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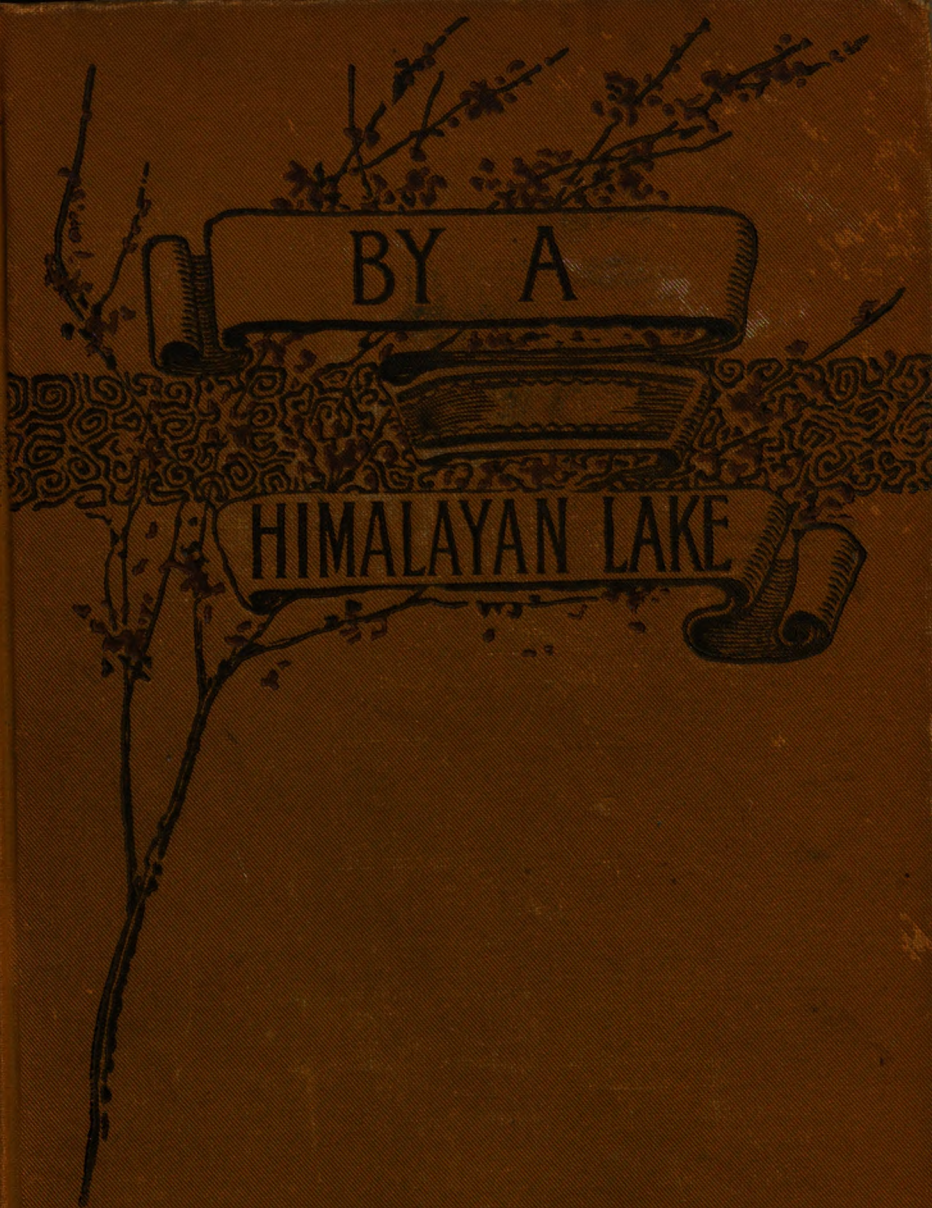
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BY A

HIMALAYAN LAKE



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BY A

HIMALAYAN LAKE

BY
AN IDLE EXILE

AUTHOR OF "INDIAN IDYLS," "IN TENT AND BUNGALOW,"
"IN THE MUTINY DAYS," ETC.

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BY A HIMALAYAN LAKE.

CHAPTER I.

Oh, if you only knew, love—Oh, if you only knew
The false love from the true, love ! the false love from the true ?
—*Old Song.*

“THERE, mother ! that’s the last box packed ! I *do* feel as if I were really going now !”

And the spring sunlight, stealing in at the window of the old rectory, kissed Hetty’s fair hair with a golden kiss, as the latter shut down the lid of the box with a bang of satisfaction, and looked up at her mother with a smile.

But her mother’s face was not bright, and she looked down at Hetty, her eyes filling with tears. The girl

sprang up, and threw her arms round her mother's neck.

"Oh, mummy darling! I didn't mean to pain you! Of course I'm glad to go! You wouldn't have me sorry to go to Jim, would you?"

The mother's only answer was a long kiss on the curly head on her shoulder. But the iron was entering into her soul. For was not Hetty the youngest, brightest flower of the flock? and when she left the dull old Rectory, would not all its sunshine vanish?

Yet she would not have had it otherwise.

To bear, to rear, to train, and then to lose.

Wondrous thing this mother's love, that, looking back so unselfishly to its own young days, stifles every jealous murmur, and gives its darling up to a stranger.

Hetty was packing her *trousseau*

for India, and her days at home were numbered. For, a year and a half before our story opens, Jim Sherringham, an Indian civilian, had come home on furlough, and had stayed with his elder brother, the squire, at the Hall. And there, in the pleasant summer time, with its tennis and boating, Hetty Mainwaring had burst upon him, after fifteen years of exile, a vision of fresh girlish beauty. What wonder that Sherringham was seized with a desire to transplant this English daisy to his Eastern home.

As for Hetty, he treated her as she had never been treated before. The neighboring curates either scorned her as a frivolous child, or bored her with parochial confidences and uncouth attentions. The London young men, shooting at the Hall, flirted with and chaffed her, but, she felt all the time, despised her as country-bred. Jim

Sherringham alone respected her, and, above all, treated her as a *woman*. What surer way to win a girl's heart at seventeen?

So they were engaged, and a closer acquaintance revealed to Hetty all the genuine worth of the man.

"The best fellow in the world, when you get to know him," said Jim's friends; and Hetty quite agreed with them. Of course he might have been better-looking. India, taken in large doses, improves no European's appearance. And then he had lived so much by himself, and away from ladies' society, that it was a standing puzzle to the honest fellow himself what winsome Hetty could see to like in him.

Though Jim was quite in a position to marry at once, Hetty's parents insisted on a long engagement on the score of her youth, and Jim returned to India alone. But Hetty never wavered in her allegiance. To her India was *couleur de rose*.

It meant a new life, a wider sphere. The country chrysalis longed to burst its shell, and to spread its butterfly wings in a newer and brighter world.

So in the spring matters arranged themselves. To begin with, Hetty's elder sister, the wife of a penniless subaltern, obliged to soldier in India, was ordered by the doctors to the hills for the hot weather. Secondly, Jim wrote proposing an irreproachable chaperone for the voyage in the shape of Mrs. Postlethwaite, the wife of the commissioner of his district. And, lastly, he won over Elinor and her husband to his side by offering to take a house for the former at the hill station of Simree, whence Hetty could be married when Jim should be able to get a month's leave and run up thither.

Thus, as we have seen, Hetty packed her *trousseau*. Ten days later she said good-by to the old home, in all the beauty of its early spring foliage, and stood

shivering in the east wind on the deck of a P. and O. steamer, taking leave of her parents—a very tearful Hetty.

Before night, however—thanks to the same stiff east wind—Hetty had succumbed to sea-sickness in her cabin, where she lay for the next thirty-six hours, marveling whatever had induced her to undertake this fearful voyage.

On the second morning, however, she began to take notice, as the nurses technically say of babies. Her cabin companion was a Mrs. St. Clair, the wife of a major in the 8th Lancers, whose various paraphernalia seemed to take up three times her allotted space in the cabin. Her English maid being, of course, *hors de combat*, poor Mrs. St. Clair was not “fixed up” this morning, and presented a most dilapidated appearance, with her fringe all out of curl. Perceiving that Hetty had got her sea legs, she proceeded to make use of her

in various ways, interspersing her orders and entreaties with a running grumble on the ship in particular and on India in general.

"Such a time of year to make one go out, just as the season's beginning! Please, my eau de Cologne—the right-hand pocket of my bag! I've just missed the steeplechases at Sandown—such a bore! Oh, thanks! Would you mind dabbing my forehead? I feel so faint. Not on my eyebrows; it takes the color out. And such a lot of people to be boxed up with for a month! I never saw such a horde; did you? A regular lot of yellow old *qui hais*, going *home*, not going *out*, I say. How on earth am I to curl my hair if they don't allow any lights in the cabin? I declare I shall never be able to dress in this hole—and such a neat traveling gown as Redfern has made me, too! It will be utterly thrown away on *this* shipload! What a

blessing Jack Lacy of ours is on board! At all events, it will be someone to talk to. I wonder how long it will be before Jenkins is equal to putting in an appearance? I wish I'd never brought her! You *are* kind, and I'm awfully sorry to bore you so; but if you wouldn't mind hunting in my portmanteau—there's a new French book with a yellow cover. I think I could read a little. No; not the *Belôt*, the *Zola*. Oh, thanks!"

So Hetty went down on her knees and most good-naturedly lurched and rolled about the cabin, knocking her head while diving into every corner of the boxes, and finally turned up the volume, but quite in another place from that Mrs. St. Clair indicated. Then she struggled into her ulster, and thought she would try and escape on deck for a breath of fresh air before anything else was required of her.

The saloon was almost deserted, but

the groans of sufferers in the surrounding cabins betokened the whereabouts of the majority of the passengers. Day and night having been alike to Hetty since they started, and time all unmarked by any regular meals, she was vague as to the time of day, only conjecturing that it was between breakfast and dinner. It was certainly blowing what sailors euphemistically call a stiff breeze, and landsmen a gale. The ship rolled horribly. Hanging on to the furniture and the handrails, Hetty struggled along to the foot of the companion-stairs. The steps seemed alternately to sink from under and to tower inaccessibly above her; but, by dint of manual and pedestrian exercise, at last she reached the top.

A few male passengers sat smoking by the half-open door on the leeward side of the deck-house, clad in mackintoshes, and appeared somewhat surprised at the appearance of the first dove from below.

They warned her that deck meant ducking; but, invigorated by the fresh air after her long confinement in the stuffy cabin, Hetty, nothing daunted, staggered out with as much dignity as it was possible to assume under the circumstances.

Once outside, it was a grand sight to see the big ship, now buried in the broad green valley of water between gigantic Atlantic rollers that rose like sloping hills on either side, now rising to the summit, whence the sea spread out for miles in the sunlight, while the smoke raced by overhead.

Hetty felt all her high spirits return. In her excitement she tried to stand without holding on to anything. As she did so the vessel gave a big lurch. The deck sank under her feet, and she staggered and clutched wildly at a figure leaning against the deck-house. Surprised by this unexpected grip, the

"OH, IF YOU ONLY KNEW, LOVE." II

stranger staggered too. Then they both fell, slid together across the deck, and found a watery resting-place in a pool left in the lee scupper by the last wave which had broken over the vessel.

CHAPTER II.

DANGERS OF THE DEEP.

A MUTTERED something escaped the lips of Hetty's ulstered victim, as they lay prone in the lee scupper, with the water swilling round them. He tried to regain his feet, only to slip, and to come down again by Hetty's side.

"I'm awfully sorry, I'm sure. I hope you're not hurt?" he shouted through the wind.

The ludicrousness of the situation was too much for Hetty. For all answer she burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter. It was infectious, and her companion in misfortune laughed too. He was so wet, his face so comical, that the more she looked at him the more she laughed.

It was a merry Irish face, with twinkling gray eyes and a rather turn-up nose; not by any means a good-looking face, though the hair was curly under the brown "deerstalker," and the mustache over the laughing mouth fair and drooping. But it was the face of a gentleman, and, as the owner himself would have put it, of a well-groomed fellow!

"Come, we can't sit here all day in the water," he shouted, and helped Hetty up. "I've lost my cigar, too, bad luck! But I hope you're not really the worse for your tumble. What a roll it was! I'd no notion you were there, or I would have saved you. You're *sure* you're none the worse?" and the merry eyes gazed more anxiously than was strictly necessary under the hood of Hetty's ulster.

"Come with me, and I'll put you in a safe dry place. Do you know it's awfully plucky of you to come up alone? You're

the only lady who has shown yet, and there are lots on board. Been very ill, have you? Oh! come, you don't look it with *that* color! Now, take my arm—hold very tight—and I'll pilot you!"

And pilot her he did, to a corner behind the deck-house sheltered from the wind. Here he mounted Hetty on a locker out of the reach of the water that swilled up and down the deck, and gave her a rope to hang on by. Then he ensconced himself by her side.

"You don't mind my sitting here, do you? But I don't like to leave you. You might be washed overboard, which would be a pity [looking down at her]. And I want to light another cigar, here, out of the wind."

Under these very unusual circumstances it was impossible for Hetty to be as formal as her English-bred conscience told her she ought to be to an unintro-duced, unknown stranger. But, if she

had only known it, few people could keep on distant terms with Captain the Hon. Jack Lacy when that gentleman, as at the present moment, was intent on making himself agreeable. He had an easy, confidential, brotherly manner, which he had found from long experience was very flattering to women, and in this case was particularly so to an unsophisticated girl like Hetty, whose pure frank spirit would, however, have recoiled in an instant from anything like bad form.

So, leaning back against the deck-house and holding on to her rope, she gave herself up to enjoying Captain Lacy's conversation, of which he had plenty, thanks to his Celtic origin. He, on the other hand, had never for the life of him been able to resist the temptation of ingratiating himself with a pretty woman when he came across one. Thus, from being profoundly dejected at the idea of finding himself once again on the way to India

his spirits rose considerably during the next hour. A fresh girl like Hetty, without a spice of intentional coquetry about her, and for that reason all the more charming, was rather a new revelation to Captain Lacy.

Poor fellow ! He suffered under the not uncommon curse of being a younger son, with the habits and tastes of ten thousand a year, and possessing but five hundred. This sum, stretched to its utmost margin, backed up by large credit, and eked out by occasional help from the elder brother, necessitated, however, Jack's exchanging into a regiment in India before he had soldiered many years at home. There his good connections, popular manners, and sporting proclivities procured him an appointment as aide-de-camp on the commander-in-chief's staff. Jack always had the knack of falling on his feet. So he basked in the brightest sunshine of Indian society some years,

doing no regimental duty, no "hot-
weathers," till his regiment went home.
Then he tried England again. But, alas!
life there was even less possible than be-
fore, when he was younger and less fasti-
dious. There was nothing for it but to
exchange into the 8th Lancers, who had
gone out to India the year before. No
wonder poor Jack felt low at the prospect
before him !

He was enlarging on all this to Hetty,
when the lunch bell made itself heard
below.

"What do you say to going below for
some food ?" asked Lacy.

"I've eaten nothing for two days," re-
plied Hetty, "and I'm sure the sea air
has given me quite an appetite !"

So they descended, only to discover
that Hetty was the sole representative
of her sex at table. She turned shy.

"Oh, nonsense !" exclaimed her escort,
"you must eat. Captain, allow me to

put the best of sailors on board next to you. So! Now I'll sit by you here, and show you how to eat off a fiddle. (This square frame is called a fiddle; perhaps you don't know.) Your plate is fixed so, and now hold on with one hand to the table, while you feed yourself with the other. You keep your glass overhead in that swinging rack, you see. I say! look out across there! We don't want that beer-bottle in our laps! Now, Miss—Miss——”

“Mainwaring,” said Hetty.

“Miss Mainwaring, what may I give you? Try some Fanny Adams?”

“Some what?” gasped Hetty.

“I mean some tinned mutton. It's not bad; but sailors, you know, call all tinned things Fanny Adams on board ship. That was the name of an unfortunate damsel someone murdered some years ago, and cut up, and sent floating down the Thames in biscuit tins.”

"You're very horrid, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Captain Lacy."

"Well, Captain Lacy, you've quite taken away my appetite with that horrid story."

"You'll have to find it again, then, for there's nothing to do but to eat on board ship, Miss Mainwaring. The P. and O. don't starve us, eh, Captain? though quantity rather than quality is the order of the day. But the wind is tempered to the shorn sheep—I mean the appetite comes with eating. One feels like the man who said, 'No, I'm not hungry, but, thank the Lord, I'm greedy!' To begin with, there's a nine o'clock breakfast, several courses, winding up with curry and fresh rolls. Then, to stave off the pangs of hunger between that and twelve o'clock lunch, there's beef-tea (if you can get on the soft side of the doctor) for delicate ladies, and we men don't neglect ourselves either. The bar is open, and

we can get brandies and sodas, and sandwiches. Lunch is, to all appearance, as you perceive, a light meal, tinned Fanny Adamses, cold meat, jam, cheese, and more soup. But one can contrive to get a snack, though. Let me give you some strawberry jam? And then between lunch and six o'clock dinner Mrs. St. Clair is sure to start five o'clock tea-parties. You'll come, won't you? They are such fun, and the stewards hate getting them so. You've not finished—you're not going?"

"I must go and do the Good Samaritan to my chaperone Mrs. Postlethwaite, and my cabin companion Mrs. St. Clair," explained Hetty. In which charitable mission, however, she had some difficulty in keeping up her newly acquired character for good sailorship.

The sun went down in a stormy looking sky, and there was every prospect of what sailors call a dirty night. Every-

thing was battened down tight, and to Hetty the atmosphere seemed suffocating, and she fully expected to find herself asphyxiated by morning. The tossing of the ship, however, lulled her into a deep dreamless sleep, from which the whirring of the screw, as the waves every now and again lifted the stern out of the water, failed to rouse her. But about three in the morning she was startled by a swishing and splashing accompaniment close by to the crashing and booming of the billows against the vessel's side. A confusion of sounds and cries rose amid the din of the gale. Sitting up in her berth, it was a few seconds before Hetty could collect her scattered senses and remember where she was. Then suddenly, without any warning, a volume of water dashed in through the open cabin door and flooded everything, retreating as quickly as it came.

CHAPTER III.

ONE TOUCH OF NATURE.

A TERRIFIED shriek from Mrs. St. Clair, and Hetty sprang out of bed. Holding on like grim death to the door-post, she anxiously peeped out into the saloon.

It was feebly illuminated by the two lamps left burning all night. The carpets were up, the chairs piled on the tables as usual, preparatory to the morning's sweeping. But the sea seemed to have broken into the ship somewhere, for the water had rushed up and down the saloon, deluging everything.

Strangely attired passengers congregated in the gangway, and anxious heads peeped out of every cabin-door. Everyone appeared to think the ship was going

down immediately ; the women were talking and imploring, the children crying. Mrs. Postlethwaite, capless and almost unrecognizable, stood at her cabin door, forgetful of sea-sickness, demanding what it all meant and whose fault it was, no one paying any attention to her whatever.

A fat old Armenian shopkeeper, returning to Bombay, in white nightshirt and red fez, was surrounded by his clinging and terrified family.

The bridegroom, one of the newly married couple next door, rushed past Hetty *en déshabille*, sent forward by his wife to inquire what was the matter. On his way, the gushing spinster of uncertain age, on her way to India to try to get married, seized him :

“ Oh, I implore you, is there any danger ? ”

Then she drew back in dismay :

“ Gracious ! how wet you are ! ” for

he had been soaked as he lay in his berth.

"My wife has sent me to inquire," he replied, breathlessly.

"Oh, go, go!" she returned, adding fervidly, "I wish we all had husbands."

Of course, she meant in order to investigate what was the matter; but, equally of course, a totally different construction was put on her remark when it got about the ship.

The general scene, then, was enough to shake the nerves of even a more experienced traveler than Hetty. She was more alarmed than she gave herself credit for at the time. Mrs. St. Clair's terror was infectious. Anyhow, when the news came of the real nature of the disaster, Hetty somehow found herself seated on the saloon table with her cabin companion, the latter in a marvelous *peignoir*. Between the two sat Captain Lacy, in a nigger suit of flannel, who, like

the carpenter to the oysters in "Alice in Wonderland," gave a hand to each.

After all, the *Shanghai* had neither struck on a rock nor been run down. A wave had broken in the engineroom skylights, and soused the after-part of the vessel. But the next report showed that it had done no further damage, that tarpaulins were being rigged up over the hole, and that no cause for real alarm existed.

So Hetty, after pacifying Mrs. St. Clair as to the condition of her dresses in the portmanteau, went back to bed, but it was to troubled dreams. Never before in all her life had Hetty been in the presence of any danger, never had she felt so utterly alone among strangers. And all night long a young man with merry eyes was extricating her from imaginary shipwrecks.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DAILY ROUND.

THE next day was comparatively quiet, the storm having subsided. Hetty was a good deal on deck, and under Captain Lacy's escort inspected the dents and damages done to the various parts of the *Shanghai*.

Flirtation grows like a hot-house plant on board ship. Something suits it, perchance the sea air. At any rate, it becomes the daily occupation, the solace, the vital breath almost, of people who would scorn the insinuation ashore. It may be taken for granted, therefore, that a past-master in the noble art, like Jack Lacy, did not let the grass grow under his feet.

To Hetty, in her rather bewildered

naïveté, the gallant Lancer was a delightful and daily more indispensable adjunct of the strange new life into which she had been thrown. Thus, when Mrs. Postlethwaite emerged for the first time from her cabin, she beheld a very cozy group ensconced in a secluded nook behind the skylight.

The central figure was Mrs. St. Clair, spread out most becomingly on a long cane chair, wrapped artistically in rugs, and with her complexion muffled in a white gauze veil to protect it from the glare.

"Rubbish!" mentally ejaculated Mrs. Postlethwaite. "As if her color wasn't put on fresh every morning!"

Around Mrs. St. Clair were collected some of the most presentable of the male passengers, whom that lady had attached to herself for fetching and carrying duty. Hetty was perched on the skylight above, feet dangling, hat off, making a pretty

picture as she lolled back, her hands clasped behind her golden head. At her feet lay Lacy, reading aloud out of Mark Twain's last, and ever and anon raising his head to catch Hetty's laughing look. To complete Mrs. Postlethwaite's disgust, this charmed circle was within smoking bounds. Most of the men had cigars in their mouths, and Mrs. Postlethwaite abhorred tobacco.

On three sides spread the sunlit sea, already a warm southern blue. Eastward loomed the coast of Portugal, the white cliffs of St. Vincent standing out sharp against the clear sky. The lighthouse and signal-station looked within a stone's throw. Hetty laughed to see land again so close. But the cliffs looked mercilessly sheer and impregnable, churning the blue water into breakers at their feet; and the girl's face grew clouded as someone told the story of the wreck of the *Childwell Hall*, and of how the survivors were

hauled up the cliffs by ropes. But Hetty's face soon brightened again at something funny Jack Lacy said.

The group looked as if they had known each other for years, and were enjoying themselves exceedingly. Mrs. Postlethwaite's soul was vexed within her, and she scowled at them as she was elaborately settled in her deck chair by obsequious stewards.

She bore many a grudge against the "military," as she termed them. Did they not often take the wind out of the sails of her own heaven-born civil service, who were in her estimation as the salt of the earth in that beloved land of rupees to which she was returning. That Hetty, engaged to one of "our service," one of her husband the commissioner's own "juniors," as she called them, should be sitting there on terms of the greatest friendliness with one of the most supercilious species of military, a cavalryman,

was, to her chaperone, wormwood and gall.

So, after lunch, she captured Hetty, thereby frustrating the latter's design of playing draughts with Captain Lacy in the saloon till it was time for Mrs. St. Clair's five o'clock tea party.

That lady declared she couldn't exist without her tea. True, that Swiss milk is execrable, and dry biscuits ill replace the thin bread and butter of terrestrial life. True, that thick-rimmed ship's cups, on the interprandial cloth of green baize, are not attractive. True, that dinner was barely an hour distant; Mrs. St. Clair would have her tea, and her friends to drink it with her.

But Mrs. Postlethwaite was inexorable. She kept Hetty chained to her chair all the hot afternoon. Portugal had receded from view, and the sea lay all around, an uninteresting, glaring, glassy expanse. Captain Lacy, disappointed of

his game with Hetty, had consoled himself with a masculine rubber of whist, and Hetty felt life had suddenly become very dull indeed.

Then Mrs. Postlethwaite began to discourse to her upon her future Indian life, and to descant upon the glory in store for her as the wife of one of the heaven-born. Now it is difficult to take in all the intricacies of Indian social life, and especially the mysteries of the table of precedence, at one gulp. So Hetty found. To her Jim was just Jim, not an official machine with a position to keep up; and Mrs. Postlethwaite rather a dull old lady, not a *burra mem*, the greatest lady on board, the official queen consort of a district as large as two English counties, and entitled to go in to dinner before anyone else.

When Hetty ventured to express her opinion about Jim, Mrs. Postlethwaite waxed indignant.

"My dear, that will never do! In India everyone has their position and their precedence, down to a post-office clerk. Pray don't enunciate any opinion so derogatory to our service! That's just what a woman like Mrs. St. Clair, new to India, would say. Would you believe it? When my husband, the commissioner, was at Rumptipore, and the 24th Hussars were sent there, not one of them called. A most flagrant breach of etiquette! For you must know that all newcomers have to call round on older residents. Indeed, when I came out as a bride the rule was even more stringent. The gentlemen called first, their wives went round next. I fancy that to have been a relic of the old days, when so many civilians had unpresentable native wives. But, ahem! that doesn't concern you, my dear. To continue: the calling hours are from twelve to two."

"Dear me!" sighed Hetty; "is not that

rather a hot time for putting on one's best clothes and going round poking one's nose into strangers' houses?"

"Not at all, not at all, my dear. A very old Indian custom. I should do the same to *you* were *I* a newcomer. It was certainly unpardonably impertinent of the 24th. But the colonel's wife did worse afterward. She had *such* dresses, my dear—all from Paris, though she painted fearfully; but at last we got to know her."

Mrs. Postlethwaite here omitted to mention that, in her anxiety to make this lady's acquaintance, she pocketed her pride and called first.

"Well," she continued, "we were dining one night at the general's—a *burra-khana* (a big dinner)—and she actually got up and said 'good-night' before *I*, the senior lady present, had risen to take leave!"

And Mrs. Postlethwaite puffed herself

out indignantly, and glared at Hetty as if the latter had been the delinquent colonel's wife herself.

Then up through the skylight came the whist-players' voices, and Jack Lacy cried cheerily.

"Two by honors and the odd trick! I say, old chappy, why didn't you play that nine of trumps?"

Hetty's heart gave a bound of relief. Life seemed once more to hold something more amusing than the keeping up one's dignity. The dressing bell rang, and she escaped.

CHAPTER V.

OUGHT HE TO KNOW?

MRS. ST. CLAIR and her maid being engaged in the absorbing mysteries of the toilet, did not leave many square inches in the cabin for any third person, and Hetty reappeared speedily on the now deserted deck for a mouthful of fresh air before the hour and a half of purgatory that awaited her down in the stuffy saloon. At Hetty's age meals are looked upon in the light of a disagreeable though imperative necessity, to be got over as soon as possible.

The sun was setting in a slightly ruffled sea, surrounded by an aureole of light windy clouds, which it was dyeing the richest hues. Hetty walked briskly up and down, gazing at the western world

she was leaving behind, for by to-morrow the *Shanghai* would be in the Mediterranean. As she turned in her walk a familiar figure appeared at the head of the companion, and, stealing up the deck with its hands in its pockets, joined Hetty.

"And why so pensive?" he inquired, his twinkling gray eyes resting on her.

"Look at that," she answered, going aft to the raised platform on which was the second wheel. She leant over the bulwarks, and pointed to the sunset. "Look at that, and say good-by to *this* sea. I've paddled in it every year at Ilfracombe since I can remember. It's the last of home." Her voice broke, and she leant her head on the rail as if she was going to cry.

Jack's head came down too, nearer and nearer.

"Poor little child!" he murmured very tenderly. "Cheer up, though I say

it that shouldn't, for it's very broke I am at going out, too!"

Jack often degenerated into his native Hibernicisms when he was confidential. He looked almost melancholy, and his hand crept along the rail till it met Hetty's. She started at his touch; and drawing herself up with a smile, looked frankly up in his face.

"Ah! but then you're not going out to——" She stopped short; her eyes fell before his searching gaze, which seemed to have more in it than she had ever felt before. How could she mention Jim while he looked at her thus?

She turned away, annoyed with herself for having spoken her thoughts so freely, and annoyed with him for taking it all so seriously, and so unlike his usual cheery self. She resumed her walk again, remarking airily:

"I don't know what made me so silly. I'm tired, I think. Mrs. Postlethwaite

did keep me up so long this afternoon on the hot deck lecturing me about India, and as to who went into dinner before who, as if I cared!"

"Of course not. But Mrs. Postlethwaite, as I remember her at Rumptipore, cared a good deal. She doesn't love my old regiment, the 24th Hussars, as you will probably discover, because we didn't call, or play badminton, or dance in the afternoon, or something of that sort. I forget what offended her high mightiness; but Rumptipore was first-rate for pig, and with that and polo three days a week we had as much as we could do. So Mrs. P. was trying to enlighten you on Indian ways, was she? I could do that too, if I tried. I've got a very nice collection of Anglo-Indian fables. Shall I tell you some?"

This was said with such a funny look out of the corners of his eyes that Hetty could not help her face light-

ing up with a mischievous smile as she retorted :

"No, thank you, sir. I should prefer Mrs. Postlethwaite to tell me."

"That's right," cried Jack, with a downright laugh; "I thought I could brighten you up again. But there's the dinner-bell! My stories will keep, but dinner won't. I'll tell you and Mrs. St. Clair my celebrated bread-and-butter story this evening, though it generally goes down *before* dinner best."

In the evening Mrs. St. Clair, becomingly wrapped in a white shawl, was accustomed to pace the deck with Hetty's arm linked in hers. She liked being seen with the girl, whose fair fresh beauty set off her own more mature charms. Presently Jack, with the red end of a cigar shining in the gloom, joined them.

"Now for a story, Captain Lacy."

"I shan't believe a word of it,"

said Mrs. St. Clair; "*I* know your stories!"

"But, madam, this especially applies to *you*, who will have to keep house in India."

Hetty gave an involuntary little gasp. She felt Jack was looking at her amused, divining that she too would have to keep house in India, and she dared not look up. But Mrs. St. Clair rejoined:

"Oh! I never do anything of the kind. Jenkins does. I can't do accounts."

"Well, never mind; if you don't order dinner, at any rate you'll eat it, I hope. So this applies equally to you both. Once upon a time there was a female missionary who was devoted to bread-and-butter pudding——"

"I'm sure this applies more to you, Hetty," interrupted Mrs. St. Clair. "You're hardly out of the bread-and-butter-miss age!"

Hetty tossed her head, scorning a reply.

The greatest offense to her was to remind her of her youth. Jack went on :

“Well, in an evil moment, this good lady went into her *bawachikhana*——”

“Her what?” cried both auditors at once.

“I apologize humbly. I mean her kitchen, to see how her bread-and-butter pudding was getting on. Now, you see what comes of not knowing Hindoostanee. I assure you, before you’ve been six months in the country, you will interlard your conversation with Anglo-Indian slang in the most approved *quihai* manner.”

“I hope not, indeed,” replied Mrs. St. Clair loftily. “But I fancy in Northern India one must know a little of the language.”

“Mrs. Postlethwaite says so,” sighed Hetty. “But I don’t relish the notion. My reminiscences of *Noel* and *Chapsall* are too recent !”

"Oh, it's very easy," rejoined Lacy reassuringly. "I could teach you as much now during the voyage as you'd want to know."

"Oh, no," retorted Hetty, "it would be too much trouble, I know."

"And, pray, why should you think it would be too much trouble?"

"Because I can see you are lazy, sir—lazy by inclination and by force of habit. There, isn't it a true bill, Mrs. St. Clair?"

"I plead guilty," quoth Jack. "But, in order to prove the rule by the exception, I invite you both to become my pupils in Hindoostanee every day till we reach Bombay."

The proposal was accepted with acclamation. Mrs. St. Clair languidly hoped she wouldn't have to learn much.

"And Mrs. Postlethwaite can't say I'm frivolous when she sees me at work at the dear language, can she? I'll be pro-

tected from any more of her lectures. It's delicious of you, Captain Lacy!"

After a few more arrangements as to time and place, Jack was begged to proceed with his story :

" Well, an Indian kitchen is a half-dark, dirty outhouse, with a mud floor, inferior to many a coal cellar at home. It is sacred to hideous culinary mysteries into which I warn you never to pry, and for which reason I'm telling you this 'orrible tale.' However, I suppose it was the duty of the missionary to find out deeds of darkness, and so she invaded her kitchen. She found it crowded with the brothers, the cousins, and the uncles of the three servants whom she was obliged to keep solely for her commissariat department. They were all smoking *hubble-bubbles*, and preparing their mistress's dinner. It being too dark for me to see your blushes, mesdames, you won't mind me telling you that they had very little

clothes on. (You'll have to get used to that in India, too!) One man was squatting on the mud floor, holding a loaf tight against his hairy chest. On his big toe, held up in front of him, was stuck a pat of butter, which he smeared on the slices with his thumb! There, is that nasty enough?"

"Too nasty to be true, I hope!" cried Hetty.

Mrs. St. Clair sighed. "It's too horrid of you, Captain Lacy; I shall never dare to have bread-and-butter for tea in India after that!"

"There are many manners and customs of the mild Hindoo in his gorgeous East equally unalluring, I assure you," replied Jack. "But I see my whist people assembling, so I must say good-night, and leave you to digest the bread-and-butter story. I'll tell you another another day if you're good."

He held Hetty's hand a moment.

“Good-night, and no dreams of home, I hope,” he added meaningly, “now you are your bright little self again.”

Hetty dropped her eyes and pulled her hand away. But she was uneasy in her mind, and, curling herself up in some one's big deck-chair in the dark, tried to read advice out of the waves and the starlit southern sky. Conscience told her that she should let Captain Lacy and Mrs. St. Clair know that she was engaged to be married. But no, she argued, let Mrs. Postlethwaite tell them, if she thinks fit, quite forgetting, however, that since the Rumptipore “impertinence” that lady showed no wish to cultivate the acquaintance of either of the other parties. Ah! retorted conscience, how about the sunset business? Would Captain Lacy have behaved like that had he known of Jim's existence? Certainly not, confessed Hetty. But then, he never had before, and she would take good care that he

never did again. Generally he was amusing, so funny, so friendly, quite a different style of man to anyone she had ever met before. By the bye, how nice he must look in uniform! How Hetty wished people wore uniform on board ship! How she wished Jim wore uniform! But no, she was not at all sure if it would suit Jim. His back was rather round. Dear Jim! What a pleasant surprise it would be to him to find she had learnt Hindoostanee. She was sure he would not like her to be dull on board ship, and it would be *very* dull without Captain Lacy to amuse her, and, perhaps, if the latter knew she was engaged he would not talk to her. So, on the whole, she decided to say nothing about Jim. It was very difficult to broach the subject to the Honorable Jack. The two didn't seem to suit, somehow. In this manner did this naughty little person lull first her conscience, and then herself, to rest.

CHAPTER VI.

A COMMON TASK.

WHEN Hetty peeped out of her port next morning the *Shanghai* was in the Straits of Gibraltar. On one side rose the serrated African mountains in delicate colorings; on the other, the greener sierras of Spain, white villages nestling at their feet. In front, the rock barred the way, and, soon after breakfast, the *Shanghai* dropped anchor in its shadow. Not, by the bye, that there was any shadow. All was sunny and glary to a degree, with hardly a green thing visible, barring the green shutters of the houses.

Hetty's first impressions of "Gib" were adverse. The bustle of landing naturally put any idea of a Hindoostanee class out of the question till they should

be at sea again. Then there were no letters for her, which was cruelly disappointing. And last, but not least, Captain Lacy appeared at breakfast abnormally early, and clad in shoregoing trim, and was carried off by two officers of the garrison. He only returned in the middle of the night, just as the anchor was being weighed, and complained next morning of a head he wouldn't sell for a fiver, and vowed he had to put his hat on with a shoe-horn.

"Not that that is anything extraordinary," he explained. "My hatter, just before I left town, told me my head had grown, and that, in fact, he found all his customers' heads grow up to the age of sixty-five, 'excepting the *hecclesiastical gennelmen*,' he added; 'their heads never grow after twenty-five!'"

Mrs. Postlethwaite took Hetty ashore for a drive; but she was hardly a cheerful companion. A long residence in

India had deprived the good lady of any faith whatever in the honesty of any natives of a swarthy hue, no matter of what land. Her squabbles with the boatmen, whose vociferations and gesticulations quite alarmed Hetty, and her subsequent haggling with the driver of the one-horse shay, detracted considerably from the pleasure of the expedition ashore. The carriage was small, Mrs. Postlethwaite large, and it was very hot. They stopped at several shops, where she turned over piles of Spanish lace, and went out without buying any. Hetty invested, as a sop to her conscience, in a pair of gaudy Moorish slippers for Jim, which, when they eventually came into his possession, proved too small to put on his feet. The drive was continued as far as the Spanish Lines, and Hetty was not sorry to get back to the ship. After dinner she sat on deck, watching somewhat lugubriously the

lights sprinkled over the dark outline of the Rock, and (it must be confessed) secretly wondering which was the mess of the regiment which Captain Lacy was honoring as its guest.

The next two or three days passed pleasantly enough in steaming over the blue historic sea, under a cloudless sky. According to tradition, an awning had been put over the deck. As yet, however, only a single awning; the other was to come after Port Said, the captain said. The ladies grumbled, but Captain Lacy remarked, "It is better to be a despot over a few square yards of planks than not one at all," though he himself preferred sailors anywhere to on board ship. With the awning the piano emerged from its location in the saloon, just over the relentless thud of the screw, which completely deafened it, and was firmly lashed on a little platform by the skylight on the poop. With femi-

nine inconsistency, all the fair performers who had shown a desire to play on it down below were now seized with fits of shyness, and would not go near it. But Hetty, coming up after dinner, found the chairs and seats pushed on one side, a few lanterns fixed to the bulwarks, and some French chalk strewn on the deck.

"This looks like business," she cried to Mrs. St. Clair, executing a *pas seul* to test the floors. "Are you not very pleased?"

Mrs. St. Clair shrugged her shoulders prettily.

"I don't suppose there is any one on board who can dance."

"Captain Lacy," cried Hetty involuntarily, and then blushed.

"My dear child," replied Mrs. St. Clair commiseratingly, "you don't suppose any of the 8th Lancers dance, do you? It's not Cavalry form."

Hetty's heart sank, but she tossed her head.

"Cavalry fiddlesticks ! Why shouldn't they ? I'm sorry."

"Are you ?" said a low confidential voice out of the darkness behind her. "Then I'm glad you're sorry."

Hetty started, and replied loftily :

"You misunderstood me, Captain Lacy. I mean I'm sorry you should lose what *I* think the best fun in the world," and she turned away after firing this parting shot, and was soon whirling round in the arms of a young unfledged Engineer from Cooper's Hill, and congratulating herself on being able to keep Master Jack in order. But the mild rebuffs that had abashed the Reverend Gabriel Jones at home were powerless against the armor of selfcomplacency worn by Captain the Honorable Jack Lacy of the 8th Royal Lancers. It

was well that it was too dark for Hetty to see the satirical little smile which hovered round that young gentleman's mustache as he stood in a corner and watched her.

CHAPTER VII.

MALTA.

ALL went merry as a marriage-bell till they reached Malta. Mrs. Postlethwaite found someone of sufficient importance to talk to, in the shape of Mr. Justice Bumble of the High Court, and Mrs. Commissioner Crabtree, and winked at the Hindoostanee class going on under her nose.

Malta lay, as usual, baking in the glaring sea, and looking pretty enough from the water, as any land will, however; and to Hetty, who had never been out of England, its foreign picturesqueness was charming. The hour of reaching Malta had been the object of much speculation among the passengers in the *Shanghai*, for something more important than the

usual lottery hung upon it. Of all places in the world, this arid nook in the Mediterranean boasts an opera house, wherein, during the winter, a very fair Italian company performs and some of our great modern operatic stars have made their *début*. Hetty was in luck. The *Shanghai* made Sliema lighthouse by noon, and the captain announced he was not going to start till daybreak the following day, as he had to coal. Hetty's delight knew no bounds, for to wind up the afternoon's outing on shore there was now the prospect of *Faust* in the evening, and she had never been inside a theater in her life. Even Mrs. Postlethwaite grimly relaxed, and condescended to send Mr. Bumble to secure a box for her party. The tickets were very cheap.

Hardly had the screw stopped when the company's agent came aboard, and the excitement of letters eclipsed even that of the lottery. A steward bore aloft

a mail bag into the saloon, and a general scramble took place for letters scattered on the table. But Hetty, unaware of what was going on, was leaning over the side of the ship, drinking in with wondering eyes the gay scene around her. The ship lay in what is called the P. and O. Harbor, with the towers and forts of Valetta rising all around. Crowds of picturesque felucca-sailed boats, with gay awnings and cushions, and manned by noisy boatmen, swarmed round the big ship, ready to take passengers ashore, or carrying venders of fruit, lace, or curios, while evil-looking "Smitchi" hawks boarded the ship herself, to prey upon the guileless passengers.

"Too much absorbed to care for letters?" and Lacy touched her shoulder, holding aloft a budget just out of her reach.

Hetty gave a cry of joy, and, making a jump in the air, seized his hand. There

were three letters for her : one from her mother, and two with Indian stamps, one from her sister and the other in Jim's cramped official hand. She flushed with pleasure, and was running off to read them quietly in her cabin, when Jack's mock woebegone air stopped her.

"What ! no thanks ? and I had such a trouble to get them. Mrs. P. won't disentangle hers for an hour."

"Oh,. I forgot," cried Hetty indifferently. "Thanks, very much," and off she ran.

Sitting on the edge of her berth—Mrs. St. Clair's properties always occupied the only chair—Hetty explored her budget. She wandered back in mind, with tears in her eyes, to the old home, which seemed so far, far away ; to the poor old parents, who tried hard not to let her see how they missed her and how dull they were. Then she blushed again, alone

though she was, over honest Jim's warm-hearted effusions.

"My own little girl," he wrote, "when you get this you will be actually on your way out to me. I can hardly believe it. The weary time of waiting has seemed so long, I thought it would never end, and now, thank God! it is nearly over and I can count the weeks till I see my darling's bright little face again. And she? She *will* be glad, just a little bit, to see her old Jim, won't she?" etc. etc.

There was a great deal more of this, which would not be so interesting to the reader as it appeared to be to Hetty, who read it over and over again, and finally, with a shy kiss and a sigh of "Dear old Jim!" put it in her pocket and went up on deck again.

The Governor's steam launch, with an aide-de-camp on board, was just leaving the ship, carrying off Mrs. St. Clair and Captain Lacy, who were known to Sir

Henry Vanderdecken. They nodded to Hetty watching them over the side, while Mrs. Postlethwaite and her friends turned green with jealousy, and glared at the launch with a "wait-till-we-get-to-India-we're-the-swells-there" sort of air.

Hetty found Malta most quaint, picturesque, and foreign, yet clean and in some ways English, the red-coated British soldier giving it a home-like air. It was a hot afternoon, and as Mrs. Postlethwaite panted up the long line of streets which reaches from the harbor to Strada Reale, Hetty had plenty of time to notice the green-shuttered houses, with the heavily-barred lower windows, the tiny dark shops, and the black headdresses of the Maltese women, who seem more ill-favored than any other race. Looking back down the narrow street, she caught a delicious peep of blue harbor, with the ships and a background of white fort.

Once in the main street, Mrs. Postle-

thwaite hailed a canopied little carriage drawn by mules with jingling harness, and they proceeded with much shouting over the paved street, every turn showing something new to Hetty's delighted eyes. Past the opera house, a brand-new white stone structure, out of place in the quaint street, under the gate-way of the fortifications, past the walled Gardens of Florian, past ugly barracks, out into the country (save the mark!), all dust and cactus hedges, and almost devoid of a vestige of green. Verily Malta is but a stone-quarry built over! Then back again, around the Grand Square, past the Governor's palace, to the little shop at the corner, where Hetty laid in a large store of "nougat" for future consumption on board ship. At last to the Cathedral. Here, despite the flies and the beggars, she would fain have dawdled longer than Mrs. Postlethwaite would let her. It brought her back to the time of

the Crusades; a tinge of Orientalism seemed to cling round it, as if the old knights had imbibed something of Eastern ideas in their Levantine wars.

But Mrs. Postlethwaite hurried her back into the outer world, where all was again bastard Italian—the people, the architecture, the speech; and they strolled down the Strada Reale on a most important errand. I shall hardly be able to imbue the reader with a sense of the magnitude of the undertaking they had in hand. It almost cast the coming opera into the shade in Hetty's mind, for that was pleasure, and this business—the most delicious business that can occupy the feminine mind, I imagine. How delightful to do some shopping when you have been cooped up on board ship for ten days, and haven't seen a shop. How much more so when that shopping is buying the lace for your wedding-dress! Hetty's godmother had given her a sum

as a present to be expanded in that manner, and presently Hetty was as deep in the study of piles of creamy Maltese lace as if she had not just gone through a surfeit of shopping in buying her trousseau. So preoccupied was she that she never noticed the entrance of another customer, who proceeded to buy some of the celebrated Maltese thread mittens. Finally, having made her choice, Hetty left Mrs. Postlethwaite, who clearly loved a hagggle, to bargain about the price, and fell to looking at some antique silver in a glass case, which pleased her more than the tawdry filigree usually called Maltese jewelry. She was so fascinated by a beautiful old silver clasp for a belt, that a voice behind her made her start.

“Miss Mainwaring, do give me your advice about these mittens I have to get for my sister. Are they long enough for the average female mind? They seem to me as long as a wet Sunday,” and

Captain Lacy held aloft a yard or so of mitten.

Hetty flushed with pleasure and surprise, and decided the knotty point.

"And now," Lacy continued, as he pocketed the mittens, "what extravagance have you been up to, pray?"

Hetty turned away. How could she tell him about her wedding-lace when he didn't even know she was going to be married?

"I," she said—"I've not been extravagant; I've only been looking and longing, for I've spent all my money. Look at this old Greek jewelry, as they call it (though I don't see how it can be *Greek*); it is quite too lovely! Look at that clasp, for instance—that's what I'm coveting; wouldn't it look well on a black velvet band? Why can't they make things like that now, instead of this filigree rubbish?"

Jack's head bent over the case close to

hers to inspect the admired clasp, but Mrs. Postlethwaite's voice startled them.

"If you want to be in time for the overture, Hetty, there's no time to lose ; it's nearly dinner-time. I do not wish to keep Mr. Bumble waiting."

"*A riverderci*, then," drawled Jack. "Mind you give me a look in the theater. I shall look at you through my glasses, and I shall tell by your face if you are enjoying yourself."

CHAPTER VIII.

FAUST AND MARGUERITE.

EVERYONE walks to the opera in Malta. The night was still and balmy, the Strada Reale ablaze with light and crowded with people. Hetty passed up a board flight of steps down a cool stone corridor. A little door was flung open, and she found herself in a box looking down on the vast house. A troopship had come into the harbor that day, and the stalls were gay with scarlet mess-jackets. Presently she descried Mrs. St. Clair, in gorgeous apparel, seated in the Governor's box, between Sir Henry Vanderdecken and a resplendent aide-de-camp. Another minute, and she recognized the slight well-knit figure in the quiet Lancer uniform of blue and white

and gold, behind Lady Vanderdecken's chair, standing out among the scarlet and gold of the staff.

But the overture stopped, the curtain rose, and Hetty was straightway wafted into German mediæval life. Her pulses quickened over the inspiriting choruses of the students and the soldiers; she laughed over the old men, and her heart went out to Marguerite, though the latter was anything but "rare and pale," being exceedingly stout and swarthy, and only possessing three good notes in her voice. What matter? The music was there, though the voices were mediocre and the staging shabby. It was the most beautiful thing Hetty had ever seen, and her face was a study as she drank it all in. Between the acts she came back to real life, to Malta, to Mrs. Postlethwaite laying down the law to weak Mr. Bumble, and she scanned the house with her glasses. In process of time she arrived

at the Governor's box, and found Captain Lacy's glasses fixed on herself. She hastily put down hers and blushed. Had she overheard what they were saying in the box she would have blushed still more.

"Well, Captain Lacy, and whom are you scrutinizing so long in that box?" asked of him old Lady Vanderdecken, who was rather short-sighted. "I'm afraid we can't boast much beauty in Malta to rivet you so."

"No, by gad," cried jolly old Sir Henry, "that's a bird of passage, I bet, and a deuced pretty one, too! There, do you see her, Mrs. St. Clair, that little girl with fair hair, in a white frock?"

"Oh," drawled Mrs. St. Clair, "that's one of our horde on the *Shanghai*. For details apply to Captain Lacy—Sir Henry."

"Ha, ha, ha! the sly dog!" chuckled the old governor. "And, pray, since

when has Master Jack taken to little girls in white frocks, Mrs. St. Clair?" he added, with a knowing wink; for hints of certain escapades of Lacy's, not unconnected with the divorce court, had trickled out to Malta.

"Oh, it's quite a new line," laughed Mrs. St. Clair. "Wait till he's back in the land of grass widows!"

By this time the glasses of the resplendent A. D. C., as well as those of the Governor and the other occupants of the box, were all leveled at poor Hetty, who was thankful to beat a retreat into the cool stone corridor with Mr. Justice Bumble. When she returned the curtain was up. Faust had met Marguerite, and Hetty had eyes and ears for nothing else. To her excited imagination the stout, middle-aged Faust, who probably smelt of garlic, seemed godlike and irresistible, and somehow he personified for her a certain captain of Lancers. Hetty felt

for Marguerite with all her soul. In the glare and glamour, Jim, the commonplace, waxed shadowy in the background of her mind, and seemed further off than ever—if, indeed, she thought of him at all. It was Jack Lacy's voice that whispered so insinuatingly into Marguerite's ear. It was his eyes that shot such dangerous glances into hers. Such is the intoxicating power of music when you are nineteen and *schwärmerisch*, as the Teutons say.

By the end of the last act Hetty was worked up into such a pitch of excitement that the tears trickled down her cheeks, and her hands gripped nervously at the front of the box as she leant over it. Then she passed down the corridor and out in the crowd on the steps like one in a dream. Suddenly Faust's voice sounded in her ear :

“Won't you take my arm, Miss Mainwaring? You're so small, you'll be lost

in the crowd ; and let me put your cloud over your head ; it's cool."

And lost in the crowd they were indeed. Once out in the street, Mrs. Postlethwaite's portly form, on her Bumble's arm, was merged in the throng. Hetty looked frightened, but Lacy added hastily :

"Never mind ; it's all right. I know every inch of the way, and I'll pilot you back to the landing-stage, where we shall find them. Only, please, wait here a second, with your back to this pillar, while I go back and tell them I shall be a little late for supper at the palace."

Her fright once over, Hetty trod on air down the dimly lighted picturesque street of steps to the harbor. There was a delicious taste of forbidden fruit about the walk. The steps came irregularly in the pavement every few yards, and stretched across the street. If she hadn't had Lacy's arm she would have slipped

more than once. The night was starry and balmy, the air full of southern scents, and, it must be confessed, smells too. The people looked quainter than ever in the gloom. It was a delicious walk, but how short! Lacy, like a man of much experience, noticing her excited mood, refrained from any tender conversation, and rattled on in his usual manner, doing all the talking. Hetty felt all in a half-frightened half-delighted flutter with the glamour of Gounod's music and Jack Lacy's eyes over her. Alas! poor Jim, so vivid that morning; he had become a mere shadow in the memory! Too soon they reached the quay, and a dark mass evolved itself into Mrs. Postlethwaite and her party.

"You're all right now," whispered Jack. "I must give you up and bolt, or the Argus-eye of Mrs. P. will wither me. So good-by for the present," pressing her arm to his side, and looking down at

her. "I'm glad you've enjoyed yourself. I have."

"Enjoyed myself?" cried Hetty; that's no name for it! It's been more beautiful than anything I ever imagined! Don't you think so?"

"Ahem!" said Jack dubiously, with memories of Nilsson. "Well, you see, I have seen 'Faust' once or twice before; but I know what I have enjoyed."

"What?" Hetty asked, looking up into his face. She couldn't help it; it slipped out, and the next minute she could have bitten her tongue out for having spoken.

"Why, *you* know—the walk of course," whispered Jack, squeezing her disengaged hand.

Hetty freed herself with a toss of her head, and ran to join the group on the quay. Happily, Mrs. Postlethwaite had not noticed her absence. Hetty was very quiet in the boat as they glided across the harbor to the big dark ship.

She felt wildly, guiltily happy. Never before had Captain Lacy *said* he liked being with her, he had only *looked* it. Suddenly she felt Jim's letter in her pocket. It recalled him with a shock, and when she went to bed she hid it under her pillow, but dared not read it again.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE SULK.

ALL the bells of Valetta were clanging for early mass on Sunday morning from their various heights as the *Shanghai* glided beneath them outward bound. Hetty peeped out of her port to say good-by to that delightful place, and then lay awake to have a good think.

She was very much annoyed, and very much ashamed of herself. She felt for Jim's letter under her pillow, and was too ashamed to dare to read its honest loving words. She recalled her former home life, that quiet country life which had been so different, and never before could she remember that any episode had occurred to her like that of the landing-stage the night before. She was certain that the

curate had adored her secretly ; he had been so sad and shy in their walks back from choir practice last winter. Also she remembered many little inexpressible nothings from the young men of the neighborhood, who had shown a preference for her society at tennis. But then everyone knew she was engaged, and no one had ever gone so far, or looked such unutterable things, as this Captain Lacy, of whom ten days before she had never even heard. And the worst of it was, she felt she liked it. She knew it made her happy to be looked at and spoken to as Jack had looked at her and spoken to her last night. How dreadful, how wrong it all seemed to Hetty's innocent little mind ! What was it, she asked herself, made her shrink from reading Jim's letter, from thinking of him ? What was this that had changed her into a different creature since she came on board this too delightful ship ? Hetty hid her

burning face in her pillow, and longed— Oh, how ardently ! that she was safe at her journey's end, and out of the reach of Captain Lacy's eyes.

Then, being a well-brought-up young woman, she came to a resolution. She promised herself to put a guard on herself, to control those arch ways and smiles which came so naturally to her, and appeared to bring so much trouble in their train. She would be quiet, subdued, sober ; she would not laugh and chaff with this dangerous Faust, or even look at him if she could help it.

For a while she played her part admirably, and became the demurest little Hetty you could imagine, quite unlike her usual self. She avoided Lacy on every occasion, and took care not to be alone with him for a moment. At the Hindoostanee class she was most industrious, and learned a great deal. When it was over she buried herself in a book, or

did woolwork under Mrs. Postlethwaite's guardian wing. Those dangerous dark after-dinner moments she spent chiefly in the bright saloon, or with the largest group she could find on deck. For some evenings she would not even dance.

Of course, Captain Lacy thoroughly saw through her little game, and played her off by leaving her entirely to herself. He played whist assiduously, smoked vigorously, and never even looked at Hetty when she could see him doing so.

And the result of all these astute finessings and machinations was merely this: Hetty became so dreadfully bored and dull that she cried privately over Jim's letter, though I think she would have found it hard to say why. To make matters worse, a horrid sirocco blew all the three days between Malta and Port Said, making everyone feel limp and cross and squeamish.

At Port Said matters did not improve.

Mrs. St. Clair and Captain Lacy went ashore to shop and to a *café chantant*, and never invited Hetty to go with them. Mrs. Postlethwaite did not care to land, and she and Hetty were left in almost undisputed possession of the poop while the delightful process of coaling went on. The ports were all shut down and the saloon dismantled; but Hetty sat on deck, regardless of the fine coal-dust which begrimed her, and looked at Port Said. She felt very dejected, and indeed the view was not inspiring.

The cardboard toy town created by Lesseps, with its wharves, its wooden hotels, its shops, its boulevards, and squares with sickly stunted trees, has been dropped down in the sand in the most casual way. All around it stretches the desert, the lagoons, without a scrap of green to rest the eye, and the mirage repeats them indefinitely on the horizon. A troop of flamingoes in a pool are the

only patch of color in the landscape. Hetty's spirits sank. Was this the gorgeous East, the land of the Pharaohs? Or was it an inferior suburb of Paris? Or a bit of the London docks, with a blue sky overhead? As a matter of fact, Port Said, like its hybrid population, is a mixture of everything. But the bustle in the harbor is entirely European. In the East no one ever hurries themselves.

After a few hours' stay, the *Shanghai* finished coaling, and slowly sauntered down the canal, at the prescribed rate of three miles an hour. Nevertheless, a steady wash in her rear played havoc with the banks of sand. Beyond these stretched the salt lakes. Monotonous telegraph posts stood sentry on the banks, and mirages of trees and water flickered on the horizon. The only breaks were the *gares*, or shunting-places, which recurred every few miles, where the canal widened sufficiently to allow of two ships

passing. These were indeed little oases in the desert, where the blue-bloused Frenchman in charge had with infinite pains coaxed a little vegetation to grow in the cactus-hedged garden round his hut. A snowy-capped woman and close-cropped children emerged to shout in *patois* at the passing ship.

The sun went down, a lurid ball in a tawny sky. Whatever beauties it may lack, the desert has its sunsets. Hetty gazed awestricken at the unearthly beauty of the heavens aglow with fire. Even the brown sand and the wide waste of waters caught the glare. It was a glimpse of another world, of "a light that never shone on land or sea," and as she gazed her pent-up feelings found vent in a couple of big tears, which "slowly coursed down her innocent nose."

The deck was empty—people were dressing for dinner. Lacy, who had been watching her from afar for some

time, now seized his opportunity. He came and leant over the rail beside her without a word.

Hetty made a movement as though she would have fled from him, and her cheeks reddened as though they had caught the sunset glow. Some irresistible power, however, chained her to the spot ; she gazed steadily at the sunset and would not speak, but she furtively wiped her eyes. After awhile Jack turned and gave her a long searching look.

Hetty dropped her eyes like a naughty child found out.

"It's very silly of me," she murmured, hiding her handkerchief, "but this horrid desert seems so strange and lonesome, and I felt quite low. And then the sunset came like a peep into a brighter world."

Having conquered in that he had forced her to speak first, Lacy magnanimously sued for pardon.

"Am I to be forgiven and spoken to again, please?" he began softly, with a penitent look, half satirical, half comical. "I *will* behave so nicely in future, if only you won't sulk any more."

The sound of his voice again thrilled Hetty, hungry as she was for it, from not having heard it so long. All her good resolutions went to the winds, and, in spite of herself, a happy smile lit up her face again. To give her time, Jack went on in his usual airy tone:

"Not having a personal acquaintance with the locality to which you compare it, I can't judge. It reminds me more of a transformation scene; but, then, *you* have never seen that. But, all the same, I don't wonder that the desert, with the chill off and the blinds drawn down, gave you the blues. Fancy being a Bedouin, and living here always! But it seems to suit them, though, and they seem to have a high old time, if one is to judge by their

love songs. You know that pretty song, 'The Bedouin's Love Song,' don't you? where the gentleman mentions he's lying groveling on the sand before his beloved's tent. I have heard that the fleas are awful in the desert sand. No, I'm afraid I'm not sentimental!"

Thus he rattled on, and Hetty, though she was quiet and guarded, gave way entirely, and let him see his mastery over her, too. It was enough. The reconciliation was complete, and was further sealed that evening by a walk on the sands, when the ship was tied up for the night. Though the mere name of a walk on land sounds delightful on board ship, a desert promenade is by no means unmitigated bliss, as even Hetty and Lacy found out, pleased though they were to be together again. It was very dark, and the party stumbled up and down the sandhills over their ankles in sand, and Mrs. St. Clair nearly lost one of her high-heeled shoes.

That night the unusual silence of the jarring screw, and the tranquillity that reigned over the ship, combined, perhaps, with the pricks of her troublesome conscience, which she was as yet too young to have outgrown, troubled Hetty's rest. The whist-players appeared to sit up later than usual, and Captain Lacy's voice calling the game haunted her dreams.

She dreamt she was trying vainly to get to Jim, whose dear old face shone under the sunset. But the path was long and sandy, and she stumbled at every step. Jack's hand held out to help her seemed to hold her back. Jim grew dimmer and dimmer, and when the sun set he faded away altogether.

Hetty woke up with a start of terror that she had really lost him.

CHAPTER X.

WARNED.

THE arrival of the Brindisi passengers with the mails caused a pleasing flutter of excitement on board the *Shanghai* when she anchored in the Bay of Suez. They came alongside towed in a large barge. The papers had already made known their names, and there had been much speculation and some gossip anent them. In the eyes of the older passengers—the people in possession, as it were, from Southampton—they appeared somewhat in the light of interlopers. Two camps were promptly formed on board. A horrible story went the round about a swarthy, greasy looking Levantine, whose baggage had been shipped at Southampton. He was said to have come straight

through from London to Suez with the mails, with no other impedimenta than a tooth brush! However, the story was soon traced to Captain Lacy, and laid at his door. The proprietor of that well-known Indian paper, the *Pilot*, excited considerable interest. He succumbed to sea-sickness immediately, and all the voyage through turned green on the slightest lurch. In his sane intervals he was never seen without lavender kid gloves.

The spare berth in Hetty's cabin was filled up by the vulgar little wife of a man in the telegraph department (no one is ever a clerk in India), toward whom she and Mrs. St. Clair, as older inhabitants, maintained a dignified reserve. She was still under the tyranny of *mal de mer*, so there was no longer any peace and quiet for Hetty down below.

She had had no letter at Suez from Jim. But she knew that he was away in

camp, and would not be able to write any more till he met her at Bombay.

Once fairly in the Red Sea, with the Arabian and Soudanese mountains clouding the horizon on either hand, it grew very hot. White dresses and coats became a necessity, and Mrs. St. Clair astonished the ship with the variety of her cool tea-gowns. Hetty made her first acquaintance with punkahs, which disgusted her cabin companion, however, by blowing her hair out of curl. Down below the nights became unbearable, and most of the men, and some of the ladies, had their mattresses spread on deck, the latter on a part specially netted off for them. Mrs. Postlethwaite, however, viewed this proceeding with such horror that Hetty dared not follow Mrs. St. Clair's example. During the day, in spite of the double awning, the heat and glare were intense. The Hindoostanee class languished. Mrs. St. Clair was too limp to be capable of

learning anything, and even Hetty's spirits drooped. To revive their flagging interest Captain Lacy would drawl out some more of his Indian stories, and as neither of his hearers had ever read the "Lays of Ind," this unscrupulous improvisatore foisted some of those amusing anecdotes on them as his own. As they passed the lone island of Perim, with its dark rocks and solitary barracks, he gave them a graphic description of that meritorious officer of Native Infantry who to all appearance so enjoyed Perim that he always applied to be left there when the time came for him to be relieved, till one evil day he was spied by a Horse Guards official, to whom he was known, walking down Bond Street, the neighborhood of which he had never left!

Beyond Perim lie the small rocky islands called the Twelve Apostles, with one, Judas Iscariot, lying apart from the others, out in the cold. Then comes the

threading the narrow passage of the Gate of Tears, the open Indian Ocean, and Aden. Hetty's chief recollection of Aden was the little copper-colored amphibious natives in their dug-out canoes, with their monotonous chorus of "Hab-a-dive, hab-a-dive!" These sea-urchins filled their canoes with water, sank them, turned them bottom upward, and then climbed astride them, grinning like brown water-babies with curly negro hair. When a bright coin was flung down from the vessel and glittered through the water, in they went after it like an arrow from the bow, and brought it up in their mouths or toes. How glorious seemed a life like that in the ocean wave, with the sun hot overhead and the water so translucent, if, and *if*, one could only forget the sharks! Captain Lacy went ashore, and returned laden with ostrich feathers for his friends; and on they went again.

The Indian Ocean was cooler, though the sun was tropical. They had now reached the southernmost point of the voyage, and Mrs. St. Clair made up a party to sit up till 1 A. M. and see the Southern Cross. There is something very romantic in a calm night at sea in a tropical climate. The vessel left behind her a broad silver track or phosphorescence, and overhead strange stars looked down. There was hardly a sound to be heard but the churning of the screw. Jack Lacy waxed exceedingly sentimental as he leant over the stern of the vessel with Hetty, and peered into the frosty phosphorescent depths below. He dropped his usual bantering manner, and became dangerously quiet and tender. They forgot all about the Southern Cross, for the best of reasons, that they did not know it when they saw it, for it is not in the least like a cross.

Mrs. St. Clair, lying in her long chair,

star-gazing, with one of her swains at her feet, watched the two heads standing out so close together against the starlight. When she went to bed even she felt that perhaps she ought to say something to Hetty, though, as a rule, an unselfish interference in her neighbors' affairs was not Mrs. St. Clair's besetting sin. So she remarked carelessly, as she brushed her hair :

“I say, Hetty, if I were you, I'd have a care with Jack. He's an old friend of mine, but he's about the greatest flirt I know, which is saying a good deal. He's a wonderful knack of getting round women, and he can't afford to marry, for he's got nothing but debts. In fact, I haven't an idea how he's to get home again, poor dear fellow! He had to come on board dressed up in one of the stewards' clothes, because the duns were watching the ship for him.”

Hetty laughed.

"What fun! And so that's why I never saw him till we were at sea?"

"Yes; indeed, he spent some hours washing up glasses in the pantry, till the mails had come on board, and we were really off. Oh, he's very leery, is Master Jack; so, Miss Hetty, beware!"

Hetty tossed her head.

"Oh! thanks very much, but your warning is quite thrown away upon *me*! I am going out to be married to Jim, sometime this summer."

Mrs. St. Clair raised her beautifully penciled eyebrows, as if awaiting some more information about Jim. But Hetty grew shy, and turned the conversation. To say the truth, though she would not have confessed it, she felt just a little wee bit ashamed of Jim, and did not care to enlarge upon him. He seemed slow, humdrum, quiet, after Captain Lacy. There was a want of swagger and smartness

about him. Moreover, was he not a civilian? and Mrs. St. Clair laughed at civilians, and sneered at them as *qui-hais* and yellow Hindoos, while Captain Lacy despised them as "lifers" out there, poor beggars! So, you perceive, Hetty did not feel inclined to discuss further her matrimonial prospects.

Hetty would not have been a woman if the immediate result of Mrs. St. Clair's well intended warning had not been to make her realize more fully the safety of her engagement, and flirt with Jack worse than ever. People began to look and talk, and to say unpleasant things, for Hetty was so young and pretty that you may be sure there was not a wontan on board but was delighted to pick holes in her. What Mrs. Postlethwaite would have said or done, imagination refuses to depict. But, happily or unhappily for Hetty, the good lady had slipped in the companion and sprained her ankle, and

was chained to her chair, to which Hetty gave a wide berth.

Thus they went steaming on over a summer sea, Hetty in a fool's paradise. only disturbed by an accidental remembrance that every day this delightful voyage drew closer to its end, and that India loomed nearer, and with it—Jim.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MURDER IS OUT.

BOMBAY HARBOR ! Alas ! why so fair a portal leading to such an ugly country beyond ? It has few equals among the great havens of the world. Encircled by peaked ghauts, studded with hilly islands, subdivided by verdant promontories, with the town lying picturesquely on its palm-fringed beach, where the waves of a tideless ocean lap lazily ; possessing a muggy, enervating, lotus-eating climate, the crowds of dusky natives of all races who swarm in the streets of Bombay, in the bazaar, in the factories, are fairly energetic for natives, but the languid European community only seem to awake to existence when the cool evening breeze blows from the sea at dusk ; then they

congregate in their carriages at the band stand in the Apollo Bunder, with its restaurant of oyster fame.

Hetty leant over the taffrail taking in the gay sunny scene before her. The harbor swarmed with ships. There were men-of-war of the Indian navy, or of the East Indian station, painted white on account of the heat; dark mail steamers with rakish lines, and cargo-boats of every size and rig. The last homeward-bound troopship of the season lay in mid channel, like a huge white Noah's Ark, her countless portholes rising tier above tier and her deck studded with soldiers. Native sailing-boats with lateen sails, and official steam launches, hovered about.

Mrs. Postlethwaite was pointing out a boat-load of very clean white-robed and be-puggreed natives, drawn up under the side of the ship, clamoring at the top of their voices, and holding out letters to attract the passengers' attention.

"Servants, my dear, bearers and so forth wanting to be hired and taken up country. They probably speak a little English, and thus prey on new arrivals. Never have anything to do with English-speaking or Christian servants. They're all rascals. These would probably fleece you all they could on your way up country, and then make off, taking some of your things. I remember when my husband the Commissioner——"

"Letters for you, Miss Mainwaring," said Jack Lacy's voice behind them. He always took care to call her Miss Mainwaring in Mrs. Postlethwaite's hearing, though he was wont to glide into her Christian name when they were alone. Hetty could not make up her mind to resent it, for after nearly a month's separation from all her kith and kin, it was delightfully homelike to hear her name again.

She turned and seized her letters.

Her face fell. There was one from Jim.

What use now, half in hope and half in fear, to look toward the quay, and scan every approaching boat for his face? For if he had been coming he would never have written.

Hetty tore open the letter, and the first few lines showed her her fears were true. Jim's "boss," as he irreverently called the Commissioner, had not been well, and had gone up to the hills. This left his work for Jim to do, and the latter could not possibly get away. It was a bitterly disappointed letter, this of poor Jim's, only illumined by the hope of taking leave later on, and meeting his little girl in Simree never to leave her again.

The mist gathered thick in tender-hearted Hetty's eyes as she read it, and she fled to hide her tears, saying simply to Mrs. Postlethwaite:

“Jim is not coming.”

The worst of a ship is you can never be alone. Mrs. St. Clair and Jenkins were engaged in the solemn mysteries of packing, and took up all the cabin and a good part of the gangway in front of it. But the end of the saloon, over the now silent screw, was quiet and deserted. Here Hetty hid behind the funnel of a windsail, and great tears rolled down her cheeks as she read Jim's letter. Latterly she had almost dreaded meeting him, but now she felt that the sight of his dear honest face would have been a protection to her, and she longed to see him again.

But it was no use fighting against her fate. Jack Lacy's face, looking as long and dismal as it was possible for his jolly cheery countenance to look, peered round the windsail. He hated to see a woman cry, so his woebegone expression was not altogether assumed.

Hetty saw him through her tears, and

turned away her head. But he came and sat down beside her, and she found her hand in his.

"Don't cry," he whispered. "What on earth's the matter? No bad news, I hope? Can't I do anything? Hetty, *do* speak to me."

But Hetty was still too much of a child to be able to stop crying to order, when she was once fairly started. That only comes with practice, and sunny Hetty had not had much.

"Jim can't come," she sobbed. "I expected him to meet me, you know."

Jack dropped her hand and drew away from her.

"No, I *don't* know. Who is Jim?" he demanded, almost sternly, just as if he were not quite well aware all the while.

Hetty grew red and then white. The dreaded moment had arrived.

The truth must be told now. When Lacy looked at her like that she felt en-

tirely in his power. She dropped her eyes, and played with the letter in her lap.

"Jim—Jim—is—my Jim—whom I'm going—to marry, you know."

Jack turned quite away and buried his face in his hands.

There was a silence.

Hetty could hear her heart beat. Never had she seen him look like that before, and it certainly was a neat piece of acting on Jack's part.

Was he angry with her, she wondered, or hurt that she had not told him before? Or (could it be possible?) was he really sorry to hear she was engaged? Was it that he cared for her?

All this was too much for Hetty, and her tears began to flow again, but this time not on Jim's account.

Still Jack didn't speak. At last, when she could endure this silence no longer, Hetty ventured to lay her hand timidly on his arm. This roused him.

"Why didn't you tell me this about—Jim—before?" he inquired dolefully.

Hetty's heart gave a bound. He *was* sorry, then!

"I was afraid——" she began, when Mrs. Postlethwaite's voice came down the skylight.

"Hetty, Hetty, are your things ready? We shall be going ashore directly, now."

"Go—go," whispered Jack. "I'll see you again at the hotel, after dinner."

Hetty fled off along the saloon to her cabin, and presently, when the coast was clear, Jack emerged from behind the wind-sail. At the further end of the saloon he met Mrs. St. Clair, equipped for landing, who shook a neatly gloved finger at him.

"What have you been up to, sir? Saying good-by, I suppose, and making her cry. A great mistake—so unbecoming."

"Please, ma'am, 'twasn't me!" laughed the incorrigible Jack; "it's t'other chap.

He's not turned up, so my innings are not over yet!"

"You are really too bad!" laughed the lady. "But please get me a boat and put me in it. The Mashams have sent their carriage for me."

Now Mrs. Postlethwaite had a habit, not uncommon in ladies of her proportions, of going to sleep after dinner. So, having ensconced herself in a very easy chair (India is the land of easy-chairs) behind the last English newspaper in the reading room of Watson's Hotel, with the punkah waving gently over her cap, she was not long before she was off into the Land of Nod.

Hetty found it very hot, and had already made acquaintance with mosquitoes, in spite of having that morning put on one of her prettiest cool white gowns, with the pale blue ribbons Jim liked, in the hope of meeting him. Perhaps, also, she had remembered that Captain Lacy

had once said that pale blue suited her fair hair, and did want him to see her once nicely dressed, for she had been wearing out all her old gowns on board ship.

The vast American-like *caravanserai* seemed so spacious, so steady after the ship, the white-robed native waiters quaint and noiseless with their bare feet. But Hetty herself was low and miserable. Disappointed about Jim, she was tortured with the feeling that she had behaved badly to Captain Lacy. She almost wished she had never seen him ; yet how she missed him already ! How dull had the dinner been among strangers, without the sound of his voice and laughter coming across the table !

It grew hotter and hotter in the glaring room, and Hetty had exhausted the picture papers. So she stole out in the broad balcony which runs round the hotel. Sprawling figures lay in huge

armchairs, with their legs resting lazily upon the elongated arms. There was much sipping of pegs and smoking going on.

The Delhi and Cashmere merchants, who had all the day strewn their tempting wares on the floor, had departed, and the balcony was dim and quiet. Down in the lamp-lit street an occasional hack carriage tore by, or a tramcar lumbered past, the horses' heads minus the sun helmets which had amused Hetty so in the morning. The sound of the waves breaking on the shore reminded her of home. When should she see the sea again?

Presently a figure came down the balcony and stopped beside her.

"I've come to say good-by," said Lacy dejectedly.

"I'm sorry," murmured Hetty, with drooping head. She didn't want to cry again if she could help it, but she felt

very low. "I'm sorry, too, I didn't tell you——"

"There, there! please don't blame yourself; it's just my bad luck. Everything is always against me. It's too late now to undo what the past month has done, Hetty. Perhaps if I had never met you—but there, I won't, I can't. This is what I came to say. I meant to give you this" (producing a small packet from his waistcoat pocket) "as a little souvenir of our voyage; but now" (seeing an objection on her lips) "I suppose I must only give it you as—a wedding-present. But you'll know it will mean the same, won't you, Hetty darl——" wringing her hand.

"Ah! you *suste jauwar*, why don't you *ceucho*?" shouted Mrs. Postlethwaite from within, most opportunely, to the punkah coolie squatting under the wall close to the two delinquents. He was dozing, and had ceased to pull; for, after

all, punkah coolies are human, and not mere machines, and Mrs. Postlethwaite had been awakened by the depredations of the mosquitoes on her rubicund countenance.

Hetty started, and Jack turned and fled, kissing his hand to her as he left the balcony.

Hetty opened the packet. It contained the Greek clasp she had admired so at Malta, and, as she looked, a tear fell on it.

Jack strolled leisurely down the wide stairs, and, lighting a cigarette at the gas-jet in the hall, hailed a cab to be driven to the Byculla Club, muttering as he got in :

“Gad, she’s very fond of me, poor little girl !”

CHAPTER XII.

MISUNDERSTOOD.

"I THINK Simree the loveliest place I ever dreamt of," cried Hetty to her sister, as she stood on the terrace of Crag Cottage the morning after their arrival and looked at the view.

And well might she say so, for her experiences of the last week since she had left the *Shanghai* had been like a hideous nightmare. Bombay, excepting the pleasantly sad episode of her good-by to Jack in the balcony, had been all steaminess and mosquitoes; while her first drive in India, along a street full of half-naked natives, had been a very startling experience. Then there had followed two days and two nights in the train, which was like being shut up in the cabin

of a ship, with the jolting, and dust, and heat, and glare thrown in. At a great junction Hetty had met her sister, with the child, and a tribe of servants and a mountain of baggage. Here she had bidden a not very reluctant adieu to Mrs. Postlethwaite, who sped onward to the arms of her husband the Commissioner.

At the point where the railway journey ended the sisters took a *dâk gharry*, a bathing machine on wheels, harnessed with a rotten combination of rope and leather to two diminutive ponies, which were changed every five miles. Servants and luggage were piled on top; inside, lying down was the only posture. Thus they were jolted along, with much vociferating and reviling and whacking at every stage, and accompanied by a pillar of dust behind to the foot of the hills. The bright Indian moonlight lit up wild scenes of arid plain, unbridged rivers, and jungly swamps. Frogs croaked their

monotonous chorus from the marshes, and myriads of creatures of the grasshopper tribe kept up that mysterious whirring which is always associated with intense heat. The blast of the coachman's horn, rousing them from an uneasy doze, announced the approach of another stage, and heralded another struggle with jibbing ponies, or perhaps with a team of some three or four spans of bullocks over an evershifting river.

About dawn a dim huge mass blocking the road told the weary travelers they had indeed reached the "hills."

After breakfast the ascent began. Elinor went first, carried, as Hetty remarked, like a Guy Fawkes, in a *jampan*, an arm-chair on poles borne upon the shoulders of hill coolies wrapped in dirty brown blankets. The hill people only wash once a year, on their greatest festival. Reggie, Elinor's baby boy, came next, carried in a cot slung on a pole, and fol-

lowed by his ayah, already grumbling at the cold, and carried in a kind of bag hung on a pole which collapsed altogether when placed on the ground. Disdaining any of these means of conveyance, Hetty, whose spirits were returning in the cooler climate, mounted a rough pony, whose attendant hung on to its tail when the path was steep.

The Himalayas rise with such a sudden spring from the plains that every few steps the air got crisper and more champagne-like; and the mountains rose further above them, fold after fold, away to the snows and China. The narrow path, cut out of the steep hillside, wound up the valley shaded by Scotch fir, ilex, and rhododendron, which at this season dyes the forest-clad hills with patches of crimson. In memory of far away English lanes, Hetty snatched a branch of wild white dog-rose as she passed a snowy bush. Delightful murmurs of hid-

den waterfalls arose from the gorge below, while the cow-bells jangled from upland slopes, and the ring-dove cooed in the branches. Suddenly Hetty gave a cry of delight :

“O Elinor, don't you hear the cuckoo? Blessed bird! I'm *so* glad. He reminds me of home!”

But the more matter-of-fact Elinor observed that it was a “koel.”

“Never mind,” cried Hetty; “he's a very good imitation, and will pass muster.”

Elinor glanced at her light-hearted young sister with a sad smile. There had been pain as well as pleasure in this meeting after five years. The half-grown slip of a hoyden had developed into a fair graceful girl, overflowing with buoyant spirits, and still retaining charming traces of childish ways and feelings. On the other hand, the young bride who had left her English home just as bright

was a thin, languid woman, with the washed-out complexion so common in India after spells of hot weather and sickness. Money goes no further there than at home; luxuries are necessities; and, in spite of a host of unreliable servants, the Anglo-Indian wife and mother is almost as much of a drudge as her sister on a third of her income in England. Two of Elinor's children slept in the military cemetery at Fultapore; and though Reggie was growing stronger, how gladly she had blessed Jim Sherringham for his kindly offer of a house in the hills, only those who have watched the frail English blossoms fading away in the deadly heat in the plains can fully realize.

Hetty was right; Simree is one of the loveliest spots on God's earth. In primeval ages it must surely have been the crater of a volcano, so sheer do the surrounding craggy mountains slope down to the green lake in the hollow. The

precipices are clothed with forests, except at one end, where Jacko, peaked and craggy, frowns down on the little white *chalets* perched among the woods and on the picturesque cluster of carved wooden huts called the bazaar, by the water's edge.

"Reggie baba," as the servants called him, was having his *chata hazari*, or early breakfast, too. With a coat over his flannel sleeping-suit, and his fair hair all unkempt, he was stalking solemnly about with bare feet, while two ayahs and a bearer followed him, endeavoring to persuade him to eat. In India children are never coerced, only coaxed. His mother lay idly back in a long chair, rejoicing to see him growing willful again, and Hetty leant over the terrace rails, chattering like a happy child. In these fair new scenes England had faded away into the past; Lacy became as a pleasant dream; and Jim, poor Jim! grilling away in the plains,

more shadowy than all. So much when one is young does one live in the present.

Suddenly the clatter of a horse's hoofs was heard up the stony zigzag, and round the corner of the terrace came a chestnut Arab bearing a tall slim figure in dark habit and white sun-helmet. A look of glad surprise suffused Elinor's pale face, and she hurried to meet the new arrival.

"Hilda, this *is* nice of you to come so soon! This is my little sister, Hetty. Hetty, this is Hilda Cranston."

Hetty looked up shyly, and met a pair of the softest, saddest dark eyes she had ever seen. With an irresistible impulse she put up her face and kissed the owner of them. Then she sat afar off and watched the friends as they gave themselves up to a long talk, so dear to women who are really friends.

People called Mrs. Cranston cold and proud. They judged her from her tall regal figure, her chiseled features, and

the marble whiteness of her complexion, contrasting with her dark eyes and hair, But they little knew the depth of pent-up feeling that struggled under the mask; for Hilda Cranston had not had a happy life. The penniless orphan of the younger scion of an Irish peerage, she had been left to the care of her uucle, who married again the heiress of a wealthy Manchester house. Milady hated Ireland and its people, and removed the family to London, sending the boys to school, and incarcerating the girls and Hilda in a dull school-room, whence they only emerged to walk in the square garden. What a change from the old free out-of-door life among the Wicklow hills! Hilda felt like a caged bird. In due time the cousins were introduced into London society, and milady, who was somewhat jealous of Hilda's superior beauty, began to make her position in the family almost unbearable. At this juncture her uncle died suddenly,

leaving her at the mercy of her step-aunt. Colonel Miles Cranston, of the 30th Bengal Lancers, came home on leave after twenty years' service in India, and his appearance seemed to offer to Hilda a loophole of escape. He was hardly the ideal lover she had pictured to herself in her day-dreams, but he offered all the devotion of which twenty years of roughing it had left his hardened middle-aged heart capable. So Hilda went back with him to India gladly. For two years they lived about in dreary little stations in sandy deserts whither the 30th had the bad luck to be sent, and by the end of that time Hilda had discovered her lifelong mistake. The first novelty over, Colonel Cranston went back to his old life, which may be summed up in two words—sport and soldiering, drilling and killing. They had not an idea in common, and he regarded his beautiful wife as a curious creature whose ways were not his

ways, or her thoughts his thoughts. He failed so utterly to understand the workings of her high-strung temperament that at last he left off even attempting to do so. Perhaps if their baby had lived it might have been a bond between them, and an outlet for Hilda's pent-up affection. How she felt its loss few could ever guess. Elinor Drew was very good to her at that time, and Hilda's poor starved heart had warmed to her ever since. With the next hot weather her health broke down, and the doctor ordered her to the hills. Miles Cranston, who had never had a finger-ache in his life, did not know what to make of an ailing woman, and gladly let her go. Thus, it came to pass that Elinor found her friend ready to welcome her on her arrival at Simree.

CHAPTER XIII.

PLAYING WITH FIRE.

EVEN the longest chats must have an end ; and the sun climbing over Sher-ke-danda, and pouring fiercely down into the valley, warned Hilda that it was time to ride home to breakfast.

"I hope we shall be great friends," she said to Hetty, as the fresh girl's face turned up to hers at parting. "We must have some rides together."

Hetty's face brightened, and then fell. "I haven't a pony."

"Oh, you *must* have one. Dandies are such a lugubrious way of going about, when you are well and strong ; and there are no wheeled conveyances possible here, you know. Surely Mr. Sherringham, among his many ponies, has one which

will suit you." And with a nod and a smile she mounted and disappeared.

Kohinoor, the chesnut Arab, picked his way cautiously down the stony zigzag path to where it joined what might by courtesy be called the high-road. There he cocked his ears and gave a low whinny, for he perceived an acquaintance of his, a little gray pony mare of polo celebrity, cropping the ferns and weeds off the bank overhanging the road. Her owner held her bridle loosely in his hand and leant against the rock, a tall, slim young figure in breeches and boots, and a check cotton "duster" coat, with a broad gray felt Terai hat pushed to the back of his head. When Kohinoor and his rider hove in sight he roused himself with alacrity and came forward, taking off his hat.

"Good morning, Mrs. Cranston. Hope you won't mind my waylaying you, but I called round at your house to see if you would come for a ride, and they told me

you had gone up to Crag Cottage ; so I followed. Anyway, I may ride home with you, mayn't I ?" And he laid his hand on the Arab's neck, and looked up into the rider's face with an undisguised imploring glance of admiration.

For a brief second a gleam of pleasure shot over Hilda's face, but she repressed it instantly, and replied, lowering her eyes, though, before his :

"Oh, yes, if you like, Mr. Adayre. I've been to see a great friend—my greatest, I may say [with a little sigh]—Mrs. Drew, a gunner's wife, just come up. She has such a sweet little sister come out to her, to be married to a civilian. Such a dear little Greuze face, I felt quite taken with her."

Alan Adayre remounted the gray, and rode by the side of the Arab along the path which wound about the precipitous hill-side in and out of gorges and gullies all clothed with ilex and rhododendron,

through which the morning sun cast a flickering shade on horses and riders.

"I'm sorry you've got friends come up," quoth Adayre suddenly, after a silence, flicking at the branches as he passed, while a vexed look stole over his handsome features.

"And why?" asked Hilda, turning her large soft eyes on him inquiringly.

"Oh, I know how it will be," he stammered. "I mean, you won't let me see anything of you; you'll be always with them."

Hilda sighed.

"If you knew how few friends I have in the world—have ever had—you wouldn't talk like that, or grudge me them," she answered wearily.

"Oh, please," cried the young man eagerly, noticing her distressed look—"please don't look so sad! I didn't mean to pain you, you know—not for worlds. But you understand what I mean—" and

he tried to catch Kohinoor's mane again.

Hilda, however, straightened herself in her saddle and shook the Arab's reins ever so little, so that that intelligent animal gave a little amble which put a pace or two between him and the gray mare.

"Indeed I do not, Mr. Adayre. I don't see why my friends should not be yours. I'm sure you'll think the little sister pretty, and will like Mrs. Drew, though she is so delicate; she doesn't go out much. Here's a level piece of ground. Let's have a trot."

It is difficult to converse coherently when picking your way single file at full trot over what in Simree is called by courtesy level ground. The rock juts out in the path, and loose stones abound. The road gives sudden twists and turns, and you shave the boulders on one hand or overhang the precipice on the other. Hilda did not pull up till they reached

the place where the little zigzag leading to her house branched off.

"Here I'll say good-by," said she decidedly, but holding out her hand.

"What are you going to do this evening?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing in particular," she answered, rather wearily; "I never do——"

"Will you let me row you about on the lake, then?"

She hesitated. But he looked so beseeching she gave way.

"Well, then—yes. But I'd rather have a sail in your center-board, if there's a wind, and I'll bring Hetty Mainwaring; she will enjoy it."

Adayre looked disappointed.

"Just as you like. But I hope there won't be a wind," he added softly.

But Hilda had turned her horse's head, and was already climbing the upward path, and he fancied she did not catch his last words. But he did not see her

fingers tighten spasmodically on Kohinoor's rein (who thought she was afraid of his stumbling), or the look of pain which came into her eyes.

Alan Adayre had come up to Simree on a couple of months' leave, hoping to throw off a sharp attack of fever, which, like so many "griffs," he had brought on from overdoing it at pig-sticking and polo in his first hot weather. At a big Government House dinner soon after his arrival he chanced to find himself next Mrs. Cranston. He was struck by her cold statuesque beauty, as many were, but a few casual remarks about Ireland touched a secret spring in them both. They discovered they had friends, and even relations, in common, and that, moreover, they were both new to India, and strange and discontented in the land. Hilda was roused, and her manner became so changed and animated that her neighbors could hardly believe that this

was the Mrs. Cranston who was reported to give herself such airs because her cousin was an Irish peer.

As for Adayre, he had not been the same man since that fateful evening. Next day he cunningly contrived to meet Hilda in her morning ride, and they developed further sympathies in common in the way of a love of horses and music. The friendship thus begun progressed rapidly. Adayre turned up at Fair View as often as he could conveniently find a decent excuse for so doing, in the way of a new book to bring, a new song to try.

To Hilda he came like a gleam of sunshine into her cheerless life—a whiff of the far-off Irish days. With her finer, more spiritual nature she only felt the affinity of their sympathetic souls—the friendship which, as the Abbé Roux puts it, is two bodies, one soul. He, man-like, worshiped her with an ever-increasing passion, which he could scarcely hide,

and which, when, as on this morning, she caught a glimpse of it, alarmed her by its intensity, and made her shrink back into her former frigid self.

Alas for Adayre's deep-laid scheme of a *tête-à-tête*! There *was* a wind, and Hetty got her sail. She and Hilda lay on rugs at the bottom of the boat, and Adayre steered and managed the sails. A fitful wind, inconstant as a woman, puffed down the gorges from behind Jacko, and their little craft raced before it over the green sunlit water. Then it died away, leaving them idle "as a painted ship upon a painted ocean," with the precipitous cliffs of Smuggler's Rock towering above them in deep shadow.

Hetty, in high spirits, chattered away to very silent companions. Hilda lay back on her cushions, her dark eyes scanning dreamily the light clouds that chased each other over the blue sky, casting fitful shadows on the heights above them.

Adayre was very silent too. Hetty watched him furtively. She thought she had never seen anyone so good-looking, but he was much too quiet, she decided. In fact, she did not feel at all sure she liked good-looking men, and had a vision of a saucy face, with rather a turn-up nose.

Thus evening fell over the "Lovers' Lake." The sun sank behind "Aya-Pata," or "Rhododendron Hill;" the "curfew tolled the knell of parting day" from St. Mary's Convent in the wood above the lake. The follower of Islam retorted with his cry from the minarets rising over the bazaar, and the Hindoo priests in their temple by the water's edge blew their cow-horns and beat upon their tom-toms.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LOVERS' LAKE.

By the time Hetty and Elinor got up to Simree the season was in full swing, and even the people at the English shops, who always grumbled, prophesied it would be a full and a gay one.

The lieutenant-governor had settled himself at his mountain Capua in the pretty English-looking country house, which the genius of the Public Works Department had planted for him on the very rim of the basin, a good half-hour's toil for ponies and jampan-bearers from the lake below. With him had arrived the greater and lesser luminaries, and the Milky Way of clerks who made up the government, all delighted to escape from the present heat of the cold-weather

capital. A fair sprinkling of soldiers on leave, offering ample occupation for that individual who is reputed to find work for idle hands, filled the club and hotels. Heavily laden bullock-carts might be daily seen on the Mall discharging *lares* and *penates* to be carried on coolies' backs up to the houses where families were settling themselves for the season.

The important business of calling began in good earnest, and whom to know or not to know became a burning question. Day after day the sisters toiled in the jampans wearily over the mountain sides in search of the undiscoverable habitations of people whose arrival had preceded their own. Mrs. Postlethwaite had, indeed, not drawn too stern a picture of the duty of calling.

On a certain day Lady Jenkins "received," and they made a pilgrimage to Government House. Indian officials are not born in the purple, but rise by de-

grees. Lady Jenkins, in appearance like an old housekeeper, led Elinor silently by the hand to a sofa, and remained there with her some moments without a word, for all the world, as Hetty said, like a doctor feeling a pulse. The Great Pandrum himself did not show on these occasions; but the rooms were filled with a ceaseless stream of visitors in frock-coats, and occasionally in tall hats, a great rarity in India, and the antiquated shape of which was too much for Hetty's composure.

In fact, for the first two weeks, this naughty child was always on the verge of laughing at someone or something.

It did not take very long for this frivolous little community, where so many Europeans were condemned to be boxed up together, as in a big ship, for six months, escaping the reign of terror of heat below, to revolve in a perfect mill-wheel round of amusements. There

were "gymkhanas," or sky races, on the three acres of level gravelly ground at the head of the lake, where cricket, tennis, tilting at the ring, and polo were wont all to go on simultaneously. Three times round the course was a race, with real hurdles and a real water-jump, excavated in the middle of one of the shingly tennis grounds.

The lake, a mile long, would in the evening be dotted with every kind of craft, and an occasional outrigger racing four-oar, with sliding seats, built in England, would make a spurt up and down the course. At dusk the world would be found in the Assembly Rooms on the water's edge, drinking tea and pegs, while it pretended to read the English newspapers, but flirted and talked scandal, to the music of the band outside.

There were picnics, and cricket matches, and small dances, for the Assembly Rooms boasted a wooden floor; and usually in

India the votaries of Terpsichore (and she has a large following, and knows no limit of age) have to content themselves with a dancing cloth tightly stretched over the cement flooring.

Hetty, fresh from home, and in first-rate condition, soon won a reputation on the narrow ledges of shingle, scooped out in front of a few favored houses, that did duty for tennis-courts. Admirers began to flock about her like flies, not that that is uncommon in Simree, where a "bow-wow" is almost considered a *sine qua non*, or in India, where every passable face passes muster for beauty. But Hetty's fresh girlish prettiness and her *naïveté* soon made her very popular, and she began to enjoy life amazingly. Of course her engagement to Jim Sherringham was no secret, neither was it considered a bar against trying to flirt with her. The husband-hunting Anglo-Indian damsel is generally on the look-

out for a better bird in the bush than she has in hand.

But, to do Hetty justice, she did not flirt intentionally ; it only came naturally to her, without thinking. Perhaps she had had a lesson on the *Shanghai*, for the gilded youth of Simree soon found her too demure. They preferred a girl who would be hail-fellow-well-met on the slightest acquaintance, who would go for long rides alone with them, canoe about the lake after dark, let them squeeze her hand, and kiss her in dim corners at balls, and see her home afterward. There was no lack of damsels, aye ! and of dames, too, of that stamp at Simree, and an equal lack of watchful mothers and husbands.

An immense safeguard to Hetty in this novel whirl of amusement in which she found herself, and which was so utterly different from the quiet country life in England, was her friendship with Mrs.

Cranston. Hilda was the elder, not by many years, but by the suffering that ages. Hetty, who always leaned on some stronger will, some wider experience, turned to Hilda with admiration and respect. On the other hand, Hetty was to Hilda a welcome distraction from her friendship with Alan Adayre, which was daily becoming to her "the pleasure that's almost a pain."

Suddenly Jim wrote to say that there seemed no chance of his getting away now till after the rains, and that the marriage could not take place sooner than then. Hilda, whose perceptions were sharpened by her own sad mistake, was grieved to discover how little Hetty seemed to take this postponement to heart, nay, that she even looked upon it as something of a relief. Hilda was puzzled; for Hetty, usually so frank and childlike, never seemed to care to discuss Jim and her marriage. Could it be,

thought Hilda, that the poor child was about to drift into a loveless match, as she herself had done? Or was it only that she was very young, and it was eighteen months since she had seen Jim?

“Ah! this detestable India, with its inevitable separations. It has much to answer for,” she sighed to herself, as she mused over it all, riding one day up to Crag Cottage.

She found Elinor, who did not pick up as quickly as she ought to have done in Simree, lying in a long chair in the veranda, where Hetty was arranging flowers and ferns in a tall glass.

“See, Hilda,” she cried, “what a wealth of maiden-hair and parsley fern, such as would be the glory of a hot-house at home, all picked under a rock close by. Don’t they look well with the gladioluses?”

“Yes, and it’s a treat to see the old scarlet geranium again; it won’t grow in

the plains," remarked Hilda, sitting down by Elinor, who began telling her the news she had had from her husband down below.

Hilda, in return, mentioned that she had heard from Colonel Cranston.

"He's a regular salamander! He writes they're having charming hot weather; hardly wants a punkah, though the glass is at 90 degrees, and gives me all the distances at which he has killed—I don't know how many—black buck. Indeed, there are some people who do enjoy India! But, Elinor, have you heard about the new aide-de-camp? Lady Jenkins told me yesterday. He's a very amusing man, I believe, that Captain Jack Lacy of the 8th Lancers, who——"

There was a crash in the verandah. Hetty looked in with a scarlet face.

"O Elinor! I'm so sorry! I've let the flower-glass fall. But I'll get you a

much prettier one at the English shop.”
And she hurried into the house.

Evidently Fate was not going to let her have any peace. Mephistopheles was hard at work, and Faust was coming to the front once more.

CHAPTER XV.

RE-ENTER FAUST.

IT was two mornings after the above that Mrs. Cranston gave Hetty the great treat of a mount on Kohinoor, she herself riding one of Adayre's polo-ponies, Fate, or the individual mentioned at the close of the last chapter, led them along the path coming up from the plains by which the wearied traveler entered the paradise of Simree. It hung over the very verge of the cliff, down which the torrent, which escaped from the lake, leapt in a series of cascades thousands of feet into the green valley below. Beyond this lay the plains shimmering in a haze of heat.

Hetty had been unusually preoccupied and silent during the ride. She could

not get over the sudden news she had heard of Jack Lacy's expected appearance in Simree. She was delighted, and yet frightened. She could not decide how she should treat him. If he were cold to her, a mere acquaintance, she felt all the joy would be gone out of her life, and, on the other hand, could he with honor act otherwise, now he knew all about Jim? No, she said to herself, with great firmness, all that nonsense must be over between them, and she would be very distant and chilly to him. He should not call her "Hetty" again.

She longed for Mrs. Cranston's advice yet feared to ask it. She felt it would be easier to make a confidante of her than of her sister, who was so quiet, so very proper. Yet Hilda, too, she knew, hated anything like bad form, and Hetty cared for her too much to risk losing her good opinion.

With all these pros and cons in her

little head, poor Hetty was scarcely enjoying her ride on Kohinoor, when, lo and behold! round the angle of a rock she came suddenly upon the object of all these deliberations.

Jack might have dropped from the skies, or, to speak more correctly, have been wafted by his friend Mephisto from a region hotter than the plains. Yet it was he himself, in a rough traveling-suit, a hideous and gigantic sun helmet like a mushroom, collarless, travel-stained, and bestriding a rough hill pony, with a coat like a bear. Not a very presentable or smart looking Jack, but yet very much himself, as he fixed the inevitable eyeglass in his eye, and withdrew the equally inevitable cigar from his mouth.

“By George! Yes it is! Hetty! Miss Mainwaring! The top of the morning to ye!” and an elaborate bow from the sun helmet followed.

The sun did not stand still, or the sky

fall, or anything unusual take place. On the contrary, the noisy tree-cricket overhead went on with his whirring rattle, and the hill-pony, who had had no breakfast, began calmly to crop the weeds by the wayside. But everything seemed to swim before poor Hetty's eyes, and she was only dimly conscious that Lacy appeared delighted to see her, and said a great deal to that effect. When he disappeared a sudden gloom seemed to fall over the bright morning.

But Hetty's face had expressed all the pleasure she would not confess, and Hilda, standing by and watching the meeting, had a sudden *éclaircissement*. A few discreet questions on the road back, and her little friend unburdened her soul to her, only suppressing certain little incidents at which Hilda guessed. It was a great relief to Hetty, and she chatted on about Jack's sayings and doings without a mention of Jim clouding her narrative.

"It is as if he did not exist," thought Hilda to herself. "And yet they may be married in two months! What is to be done?"

Two days later there was a "burra khana"—a state banquet—at Government House, and Mrs. Cranston was bidden for the second time. Lady Jenkins liked to have her, for she was very ornamental, and very good-natured about singing with her fine contralto voice; and was she not the first cousin of a peer? A little flavor of aristocracy goes a long way and is much sought after in the land of precedence, though it will not send you into dinner before a civilian of longer standing, or drawing more rupees a month, than yourself.

The state banquets were not at all to Hilda's mind. She thought the Jenkinses vulgar, and the flunkeyism and toadyism that pervaded their surroundings disgusted her. But she consented

to accept when she found Mrs. Drew and Hetty were invited. So when the evening came they started up the hill in a procession of jampans, Hetty in a state of suppressed excitement which kept her quiet, though her flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes betrayed the tumult of her feelings.

Captain Lacy himself, in the character of A. D. C., and resplendent in mess-dress, received them in the portico, amid a herd of servants, and managed to whisper to Hetty, while taking off her cloak:

“I shan’t see anything of you till after dinner, as I have not been able to arrange to sit near you. Young Jones, of the 30th Native Infantry, is to take you in. Let him down easy. I *must* have a talk with you in the conservatory after dinner.”

All this was most delightfully confidential. Poor Hetty! How fast the net was closing round her again!

Then he escorted them to the drawing-room, where Lady Jenkins stood receiving her guests amid an elegant circle of real English upholstered chairs and sofas, with the big-wigs of Simree sitting on them. She pressed their hands, and beamed silently upon them, as they were introduced by name. Then they were relegated to the English chairs, and the next batch brought up. It was all very correct and solemn and grand, not to say impressive. Everyone wore their best frock. Now in India no one has more than one best frock at a time, as the occasions for wearing it are not of frequent occurrence. Therefore the women had a fine opportunity for noticing the changes of fashion during the last three or four years. Hetty thought she had never seen such garments, and was about to make a remark to that effect in an undertone to Elinor, when she caught Captain Lacy's eye glass fixed on her from the

other end of the room with such a funny "now-mind-you-behave-nicely" sort of expression, that she nearly bubbled over with suppressed mirth. Young Jones, separating himself boldly from the knot of men, all in uniform or brass-buttoned official dress, who hung about the door, came up to talk to her. But Hetty sent him away for fear she should laugh outright.

Presently, when all were feeling very hungry, and were furtively consulting their watches, enter Sir Joseph Jenkins himself, hurriedly. He was a podgy little man, with a ragged beard, and his hair wanted cutting. Something of a scholar, rumor credited him with having dabbled in every known form of religion, and being at this moment a Buddhist, if anything. He loathed society, and would not have fared badly in a Trappist cell. He was trotted round by his A. D. C., and introduced to every lady

present, to whom he bowed as quickly and slightly as possible. Then giving his arm to the "seniorist," he made off in the direction of dinner. There was a general hunt for partners, and a *sauve qui peut* after him.

Though Lacy had not been many days in office, he had studied the *carte du pays*, and Mrs. Cranston found herself sitting next Alan Adayre, and taken in by a gluttonous old colonel, who did not make many demands on her attention. Young Jones, who was rather far gone on the subject of Hetty, was very young and raw, and Lacy had thought him safe. Jones had never found Hetty with so little to say for herself. She was really straining her ears to catch Lacy's voice at the other end of the table, where he was making them all laugh.

Hilda Cranston, in black velvet and diamonds, looked like a denizen of another world among the motley com-

pany. Sir Joseph and Lady Jenkins sat opposite each other, that the latter might supervise the eating and drinking which so much affected the gubernatorial temper. Sir Joseph drank only from a special bottle he kept under his chair, in order, he explained, to regulate the quantity he imbibed ; but his guests, who were apt to have a headache after dining with him, put a less charitable construction on the habit.

Around the center of the table the presence of the hosts froze the "seniors" around them into a most becoming state of dignity and *ennui*. But at the far ends of the table, and especially at that presided over by the A. D. C., where the younger and smaller fry congregated, there was plenty of fun. If the conversation flagged at all, Lady Jenkins would nod her cap ribbons in Lacy's direction, and beam upon him with a "Now, do be funny, Captain Lacy, do," which, of

course, had a most sobering effect upon him.

The longest meal must, however, have an end, howsoever slow the red-coated "kitmutghars" are in producing the never-ending courses from the far distant kitchen of an Indian house.

Hetty rejoiced to find herself back in the drawing-room listening to Mrs. Commissioner Crabtree discussing the peculations of domestics with her sister. Even a lieutenant-governor cannot make an after-dinner cigarette last forever, and at last the gentlemen emerged. The bolder came first, hovering about the door, and spying to see how the ladies were grouped. Then the mass followed with a rush, buttonholing each other for protection, and continuing their dinner-table discussions. But Hetty did not look up from the photographs over which she appeared engrossed, though she could not have told what they were,

till the longed-for voice sounded in her ear :

“ Miss Mainwaring, I’m going to show Mrs. Cranston the conservatory ; would you like to see it too ? ”

Obediently she followed her Faust into the dim light among the flowers. Alan Adayre came with Hilda, who, as she passed Hetty, gave her a little warning pressure of the hand.

Lacy pointed to two low wicker chairs, where the light of a Chinese lantern above would fall full into Hetty’s face.

He sank into one beside her.

“ And now tell me all about yourself, and what you have been doing since we parted. Do you remember how we parted ? How I blessed that punkah-coolie and old Mother P. ! Do you know I can scarcely believe, even now, that it really *is* you ? I was so surprised to meet you, and I had a very *mauvais quart d’heure*. For I called you ‘ Miss Main-

waring,' and had no idea, all the time, what mightn't have happened to you, or what you might not be? Tell me, you're still Hetty Mainwaring of the *Shanghai*, are you not?"

Hetty played with her fan demurely.

"Nothing is fixed yet; Jim can't get away."

"I *am* so glad! I think I should have chucked up my appointment here if—if—it had been otherwise. I don't want to meet Jim. Then I may consider myself back again on *Shanghai* footing—eh? Do say I may, please, and be nice to me. I can get all sorts of fun up for you here if you will."

Hetty lay back in her chair and drank in the voice of the charmer, who charmed so wisely, like the old hand he was. A long vista of delight all through the season seemed to open to her, now Jack had come up. Through the open window rang Mrs. Cranston's and Adayre's

voices, mingling in a duet in the drawing-room :

La ci darem la mano,
Vorrei e non vorrei.

Poor little weak, hesitating Zerlina !

The *tête-à-tête* was broken up by a rustling of skirts, announcing that the "seniorist" lady was taking leave. Lacy had to rush back and arm her out and pack her up in her "dandy."

Mrs. Cranston and Mrs. Drew were among the last to leave, and Adayre, chatting to Lacy in the hall, while the ladies put on their cloaks, saw a be-dressing-gowned figure peep out of Sir Joseph's sanctum, whither the lieutenant-governor had retreated when the gentlemen left the dining room. The old bear beckoned to Lacy :

"Have the hogs left? Can I come out?"

By which elegant epithet he designated his departing guests.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHAT PEOPLE SAID.

TEN days later, let us glean a notion how society at Simree was going on, by peeping into a few of the letters in the mail bags, as they are carried down the hill on coolies' backs.

Here is a sweet one from Mrs. Crabtree, whose tongue is celebrated all over India, to her lord and master, commanding Miles Cranston's regiment :

By the bye, I think it right to let you know the perfectly disgraceful way in which Mrs. Cranston is carrying on with a gunner up here, whom she gives out is a sort of connection of hers. Perhaps, as the commanding officer, you might say something. ["Rubbish !" mutters the Colonel, as he reads ; "it's not my affair. What d—d fools women are !"] She is very much admired, and quite taken up by Lady Jenkins, but still goes on in that disagreeable way of hers, of calling nowhere and knowing no one. She hardly ever comes to see *me*, though I often ask her up to tea

and to have a long chat. She's got some nice dresses out from home, and is one of the best dressed women here. How Colonel Cranston does it *I* can't imagine ! This young Adayre is very good-looking ; but Mrs. Cranston has got a tight hold on him, and he's not allowed to speak to anyone else. Whenever I go to call I always find him singing with her, and they ride about together every evening. You know it's not *my* way to repeat things ; but still, this is such a place for gossip, and I can't help telling you how I met them getting out of a boat quite in the dark. They must have been on the lake for *hours*. Now, I would not do such a thing, even at *my* age. [“ You wouldn't get the chance !” comments that most censorious of critics, the husband ; for Mrs. Crabtree was on the shady side of forty, and had never been a beauty.] Do you think it would be any good your saying anything to Colonel Cranston ? I don't believe, though, she cares a scrap for him or he for her ! Poor Mrs. Drew does not get strong ; and though I often go up and prescribe for her, I can't get her to follow my advice. She has a pretty sister come out, engaged to Mr. Sherringham, the civilian. But I'm afraid she's rather a flirt, for Captain Lacy, the new A. D. C. (*the* Captain Lacy, you remember, Mrs. Chappell's friend), seems very much taken with her. I myself don't see much to admire in her. She's one of your very fair girls, with pink cheeks. I shouldn't wonder if she rouged. I'm told quite young girls do now at home. [Mrs. C.'s complexion was a slur

on ancient parchment.] She and Mrs. Cranston are great friends, which won't do her any good. If young Sherringham is in the station you may tell him from me the sooner he comes up and is married the better. I don't think that Captain Lacy manages the Government House dinners nearly as well as Captain Grey last season. I've not been asked yet, and to my certain knowledge Mrs. Cranston has been asked twice. This place is much as usual. That odious Mrs. Lollipop is up here again with Captain d'Angliar, of course. That's been going on for the last three years to my knowledge, and she must be thirty-five if she's a day. Norah O'Brien has filched young Greene away from poor Patty Pringle, and she'll never have another chance, for she's getting on. The Smiths had a great row at the last dance, and she's not to speak to Major Day again. I wonder how long *that* will last?

I like the new chaplain very much. He gave us a most edifying discourse on Christian charity last Sunday, which nearly made me weep. I'm sure it's much needed *here*! Dear Mrs. Postlethwaite comes up from Boggulwallah next week, so I shall have someone to talk to.

This is part of Elinor Drew's daily letter to her husband:

DEAREST CHARLEY:

So glad to hear you are not feeling the heat, poor old man! I'm getting on famously. I wish

you could see the color on Reggie's cheeks, and the amount he eats. I bless the best of fellows, Jim Sherringham, every day. I should be glad to have another check; this place is very expensive, manage how I will. Hetty is very much admired (I wish you could see her), and that brings people to the house. She is far prettier than any of us at her age, and such spirits! Almost too much for me at times, pleased as I am to have her with me. I wish Jim could settle when it is to be, for I feel the responsibility of her much. Young Jones, of the 30th N. I., spoke quite seriously to me about her the other day, and Captain Lacy, the new A. D. C., is always dropping in. It seems he came out on board ship with Hetty, and he is the most amusing man. Mr. Adayre has got over his fever. You remember him at Woolwich, don't you? Hilda Cranston is so much brighter and happier, and looks so queenly among the second-rate women here. Perhaps she is happier away from the Colonel. Fancy—only fancy, Charley—if I were happier away from you, instead of more miserable! She is going to take Hetty to the military ball. I don't feel up to it, but Hetty has been to no dances. As it is, the whirl of gayety up here is enough to turn any girl's head and unfit her for a quiet station, and the style of people are not nice. I wish she were married; yet sometimes she seems too young, too careless; yet I was no older, etc.

This from Captain Lacy, in a round
Eton boy's hand, to Mrs. St. Clair;

Dear Madam : I'm awfully sorry to hear you are so seedy and miserable down below. I've been house hunting, but I can't find a single decent hole for you to put your pretty head into. You'll think these hill-houses pigstyes.

I'm scratching along very well, and the place is sport for a man ; but you won't like it or the people. The old Jenkinsons are, of course, rather a scourge, but the old woman has taken to me, and I do as I like. I've made them embark on a series of solemn banquets. The first went swimmingly, but at the second, when the *kitmutghar* [waiter] asked old Mrs. Crabtree if she'd have some peas, and she put up her ear-trumpet—for she's deaf, you know—the man filled it up with the vegetable. I thought I should have died ! But she raged, just.

My little girl of the *Shanghai* is up here, and, by great good luck, not married to her old yellow *qui-hai*. There are not many people for you to know. But do you know the D'Arcys in county Meath ? Well, Hilda d'Arcy is here, as good-looking and icy as ever, but married to an old colonel of Native Cavalry.

I'd get Lady J. to ask you to stay here, but you couldn't stand the old man's habits in the bosom of his family ! Give my salaam to the major, and ask him to give an eye to the bay charger I left with the regiment. He is too big for the hills, and the polo ground is so small, thirteen-hand ponies are big enough for the game. Sardine did well in the sky races last week. But it is a beastly course,

such corners and three times round, and all gravel. I've got a four-oar crew up for the race, "Military *versus* Civilians," that is coming on. We have lady coxes, and I have chosen the fair Hetty !

Last, but not least, here is one from Hetty to Jim :

I feel horribly guilty at not having written to you for so long, but I have been *so* busy. How dreadfully hot it must be, but the pig-sticking must be great fun ! I *should* like to see it. Perhaps *some day* you'll take me out with you ?

Thank you very much for your last. I always like getting your letters, though you say you've nothing to write about but the state of the thermometer. This place is great fun. Last week there was a "gymkhana" (I don't know if that's the way to spell it), and Captain Lacy won the tandem race, riding one pony and driving another. Also the cigar race. You must ride with a cigar alight in your mouth and come in with it alight. All the cigars went out, and no one won. Then there was a "dandy" race, the gentlemen sitting in "dandies," and driving the "jampannees" with whips, and the "jampannees" got the prize. Captain Lacy won in Mrs. Cranston's dandy. He was so funny shouting and driving the men.

I hope all this about the races won't bore you, dear Jim, but you know I had never seen anything of the kind before, and you like to hear of all that

amuses me. India *is* a funny place, and Simree *is* so different from our quiet village at home. Mrs. Cranston is going to take me to a real big ball next week, as Elinor is not up to late hours. She and I are great friends; and I think she's *lovely*, only so sad. Réggie is a duck, and very fond of "auntie" already.

Next week a most important event comes off—the boat-race, in real English sliding-seat boats, so narrow and crank. It is civilians against military; and, only fancy, I am "cox" of the military boat! I ought to be of the civil, of course; but Captain Lacy, who is stroke, asked me, and you won't mind. We go out training every evening at dusk that the other people mayn't see our "form" (I think's that the proper word). Do you remember when I used to steer you about in the old tub in the Hall pond? How long ago that seems! You never imagined me promoted to steer a real race, did you? But I do it very well, Captain Lacy says; and he promises to pull me out if we are upset, though the lake is unfathomable in parts, etc.

P. S.—I reopen this to thank you, you nice dear Jim, for the pony you have just sent me. It is *so* good of you, and I'm *so* pleased, that Elinor is pitching into me, and telling me I ought to be more dignified. Whoever told you I was longing for a pony? I think Mignonette such a pretty name, and I shall ride her to-morrow, when we're going for a picnic up Jacko.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE VEIL IS LIFTED.

MRS. HAMBLETON was an old hand, and knew to a nicety how to get a picnic-party together. She was quite aware that, if you select people and their affinities—avoiding those who won't know, or who are jealous of each other, and who will be as stiff as if they were eating off a dining-table—throwing in a beauty, or a funny man, with a sprinkling of quiet people to listen to him, and a few utility men, you may dish-up your picnic under almost any circumstances of weather and locality, and be sure that people will enjoy themselves regardless of forgotten mustard, flies in glasses, and general hugger-mugger.

For herself, she had provided a baby

subaltern, for Mrs. Hambleton liked boys. Her daughter, much staidier than the mother, had the young man she was engaged to *pro tem.*, more Simree, till someone better turned up. There were Mrs. Cranston and Alan Adayre, Hetty, and Elinor, and a few men willing to make themselves generally agreeable. Among them was young Jones, delighted, on arriving at the trysting-place by the Assembly Rooms, to find Hetty unappropriated. But his joy was short-lived.

Mr. Cramwell appeared on the scene. He was the greatest catch in Simree, a secretary to Government, mild, effeminate, supercilious-looking ; withal, good all round, and hiding beneath a carefully bored manner more brains than usually fall to the share of the average "competition wallah." People prophesied he would die a lieutenant-governor.

Mr. Cramwell took possession of Hetty, as he always did of anything nice

that was going, and the procession started, and wound its way Noah's Ark fashion up the quaint bazaar, with carved overhanging eaves and balconies like a Swiss village. Hetty gnashed her teeth with disappointment, for had not Mrs. Hambleton said that Captain Lacy was coming? She felt she hated civilians in general, and Mr. Cramwell in particular, though she ought to have been grateful for a *tête-à-tête* for which most girls in Simree would have given their eyes. So she devoted herself to trying Mignonette's paces, cantering here and there along level ground.

However, just as the road, leaving the shady valley, began to ascend the wall-like mass of cliff which blocked up the end of the Simree basin, a pony was heard galloping behind, and Captain Lacy came in sight. Mr. Cramwell passed on in front to make himself agreeable to Miss Hambleton, and add another

to the goodly aërial castle of false hopes he had already raised.

Captain Lacy liked *se faire attendre*. He also liked to see Hetty's face lighten as he cantered up.

"Good evening, Captain Lacy. I had given you up. Now tell me what you think of my new pony."

Lacy cast the eye of a connoisseur over the quadruped, and replied solemnly and laconically, as befitted such a serious subject :

"She'll do you, I should think. Where did you raise her?"

Hetty turned away her head.

"Jim sent her up for me."

Lacy smiled a smile.

"That I might have the pleasure of a ride with you? How good of Jim!"

"Jim is always good," retorted Hetty. "But don't let's discuss him, please. We're going to have a scrumptious day, are we not?"

They zigzagged on up among the cypresses, and the "dark rock pines like tossing plumes."

It was very hot, and the noontide sun blazed down fiercely on sun helmets and Terai hats. Nevertheless, Hetty felt considerably more cheerful than she had done in the shade below with Mr. Cramwell.

Passing through a nick in the mountain side, they bade adieu to the little basin of Simree, and the lake, shimmering like a looking-glass in the sun, hundreds of feet below. On this side of Jacko all was a forest of rhododendron and ilex, with green valleys and low hills running down to the hazy plains. Simree and the everyday world seemed miles away out here in the solemn noontide on the mountain side. But Hetty's laughter was not to be hushed, and her merry voice reached the couple on ahead, where Kohinoor and the gray mare paced silently side by side. The beauty of the

scene stole into Hilda's soul, saddening her, as beauty in nature always did. It made her feel insignificant. Her life, with its aspirations, its hopes, its disappointments, dwarfed into nothing beside these "rocks of ages, these hoary hills."

Adayre divined her thoughts—he was so used to watching her moods—and he respected her silence. It was pleasure enough for him to be with her. That soothed him with a magical charm. Away from her he was dissatisfied, restless, with an ever-aching heart.

On the topmost peak of Jacko a troop of white-robed table-servants were spreading lunch under a beetling crag. Gradually the party assembled, with appetites whetted by the long climb, and love and flirtation were alike forgotten amid a cheerful popping of corks and opening of tins of that crowning glory of an Indian repast—*pâté de foie gras*. Lacy, announcing he had a thirst he wouldn't

sell for a fiver, plunged his face into a long peg-tumbler, and a solemn lull fell upon the party.

But, under the influence of champagne, tongues began to wag again, and presently the men commenced lighting up their cigars, and sprawled in lazy attitudes at their lady-loves' feet. The lull of the tropical noon brooded over the mountains, though it was shady under the rock, and the air was crisp. From the woods below came cheery sounds of Hetty's so-called cuckoo, or a "chikaw" partridge called to its mate among the covert. Far above them, in mid-air, a hawk or vulture poised, on the look-out for scraps of food. Mrs. Hambleton purred complacently over her party; for had she not collected two of the best-looking women and two of the most unattainable men in all Simree?

In due course the party exhibited a tendency to break up again into twos, to

admire the view from different points of vantage, for Jacko towers over all the hills for miles. On one side lay the Terai, like an immense map, mottled with dark jungle and white river-beds, and on the other endless folds and shades of mountain overlapped each other to the north, where they were lost in clouds.

"There, look!" cried Bessie Hambleton, eagerly scanning these clouds. "Let's go home by way of Snow Seat. We shall reach it about sunset, and, if I mistake not, we shall have a glorious view of the snows when the mists roll away at sundown!"

So "down the zigzag two bodies went." And a villainous zigzag it was. Masses of shale had slipped down the mountain side, and the track which lay across the rough scar so formed threatened at every minute to give way beneath their feet and to precipitate the unwary into

hideous depths among the cypresses below. Of course ponies and "dandies" were sent round to await their owners' arrival at a safer point, for everyone preferred to trust to bamboo alpenstocks or stalwart arms.

The perilous descent gave rise to what the French call very pretty "situations." Neat shoes and ankles showed to advantage, and with charming little shrieks of terror it was absolutely necessary from time to time to grasp tightly some helping hand, or lean upon some protecting shoulder. Hetty enjoyed the scramble immensely, child that she was, and Lacy followed her, making rueful faces over her venturesomeness, and his pretended terror.

At last, Hetty, having insisted on following a track of her own, came to an impassable place, where a jump was absolutely necessary. In an instant Jack had deftly got in front of her, and landed

on the shale below. Steadying himself, he held out his arms.

"Jump!" he cried.

Hetty blushed and hesitated. Then a spirit of mischief seized her, and she *did* jump, almost on to the top of Jack, who caught her in his arms, and seemed inclined to hold her there. But at that moment Elinor's anxious voice sounded in the rear.

"Hetty! do be careful! This is a dreadful place! Captain Lacy, what is that child up to?"

"I rather think it's what are you up to, sir," remarked Hetty in an undertone, as she freed herself, and made her way on in front, with as much dignity as she could assume.

When all had got safely down and reached the ponies, someone, as they sat down to take breath, inquired:

"Where's Mrs. Cranston?"

"Behind, with Adayre," said someone

else. "I hope nothing has happened to her!"

"I hope not," cried Hetty. "Hilda's so independent, she wouldn't have a hand."

"Some people like hands and arms too," growled young Jones, who hadn't enjoyed his day at all.

But Hetty was right; something had happened, and all because Hilda would not have a hand.

But how could she grasp Alan's hand, when his slightest touch was electrical, and thrilled her very soul, making the blood course through her veins with a rapture she had never felt before?

So she plodded on, steadying herself with a stick, and Alan followed, his heart in his mouth, to see her hanging over the abyss. Still, such was his devotion, he dared not disobey her and help her against her will.

* All went well till they reached the

scene of Hetty's jump. Here Hilda hesitated too, and an imploring murmur escaped from Adayre. Then she suddenly jumped, and stumbled on landing. She tried to regain her footing, and got entangled in her habit. The treacherous shale gave way beneath her, and down she fell, followed by a torrent of stones and shingle her fall had loosened.

A low stifled cry of terror broke from Alan's lips.

"Hilda, my darling!"

Then he plunged after her down the steep, half slipping, half jumping, regardless of the *débris* that struck him. But he kept his head, horror-stricken though he was, and did not follow the track the motionless figure in the dark riding habit had taken, lest he should send more stones down upon her. In less time than it takes to tell he came upon her, brought up against a tree, bruised and confused, but not really hurt—in fact,

attempting to get on her feet. But here the mastery of love asserted itself.

“Lie still ; don’t stir till I come, or you’ll go down further.”

Then he bent over her with a white face.

“For God’s sake, are you hurt?”

His face was very close to hers, her hurried breathing fanned his cheek, and his dark passionate eyes looked her through and through. Hilda had caught as she fell the words terror had wrung from him. She felt weak, unnerved, and powerless, and her eyes rested on him as they had never done before. In an instant he had read in them the secret she had so carefully hidden from him, and at which he had hardly dared to guess.

She closed her eyes, and leant back against the tree to collect herself. Her fall had bewildered her. In spite of her aches and bruises a sweet feeling of perfect peace stole over her as she realized

the complete understanding there was between them. Then she felt a thrill. Alan touched her. She opened her eyes, and saw that he had taken off his coat, and was arranging it as a pillow under her head. She smiled at him for thanks.

"I'm better now," she murmured; "only my head is bad. What an awful roll!" she added, glancing with eyes dilated with terror at the precipice whence she had fallen.

"Yes, indeed," said he. "It is indeed a miracle you were not——"

His voice broke.

"Killed, you mean," she replied, turning to him. Then suddenly a great horror overwhelmed her. "Killed!" she repeated. "O God! I'm not fit to die!" and she covered her face with her hands, and bowed her head.

Hilda—the icy, haughty Hilda—burst into the bitterest tears she had ever shed.

She was wrung with so many mingled feelings. Shame, love, remorse, contrition—all welled up in her overwrought mind, and struggled for mastery.

In an instant Alan was kneeling beside her, trying to take her hand.

“Oh, leave me, leave me!” she sobbed.

“Have pity on me and leave me! Oh, why did I ever meet you?”

Alan hesitated. A wild, passionate longing seized him to clasp that beautiful bowed head in his arms and soothe it with kisses. He was young and desperately in love. But he hesitated, and his better nature got the upper hand.

I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honor more.

He turned obediently away, and leant his forehead against the trunk of a cypress. There he fought out the battle 'twixt love and duty which raged within him, and a groan broke from him.

Hilda recovered herself first, Con-

trolling herself with a strong effort, she spoke :

“Had you not better shout to the others to send some jampannies down with a dandy? I don’t think I can climb up.”

Her voice sounded strained and far away.

“What a selfish fool I am!” he answered hoarsely, “forgetting you here. Don’t move, I’ll call for a dandy.”

His cooey rang through the trees, and the rest of the party, really alarmed about them by now, answered him in a few minutes, and a dandy and bearers with some of the gentlemen came down by a roundabout way.

There was great consternation and solicitude for her fall when Hilda was carried in to where the others were waiting. Fussy little Mrs. Hambleton overwhelmed herself with perfectly unnecessary reproaches, and her more sensible

daughter produced some smelling salts. Captain Lacy concocted some brandy-and-water from the lunch basket. After a while Hilda felt herself again.

“I am so vexed at giving you all this trouble through my stupid carelessness. Let me see; we were going to Snow Seat, were we not? I feel quite equal to going on now, so don't let us miss the snows; it's hardly out of the way home.”

Unselfish Mrs. Drew insisted on mounting Kohinoor herself and on her friend's remaining in her dandy. This was a great mark of affection on Elinor's part, for riding in a dress is not all joy, and she was such a timid rider that she was on thorns all the time, lest that sensible animal should do something—she hardly knew what.

Alan walked silently by Hilda's dandy till just as they neared Snow Seat, when Hetty, who was riding behind, called out:

“Have you hurt yourself, Mr. Adayre? You’re going lame!”

“I think I’ve sprained my ankle going down the ‘kud’ [precipice],” he replied with a wince of pain. “I’ll get on my pony.”

But Hilda gave him a look for which he would gladly have broken every bone in his body.

CHAPTER XVIII.

'TWIXT LOVE AND DUTY.

IF a fault can be found with lovely Simree, it is that to obtain a view of the snows you have to climb, as it were, to the rim of the basin. Snow Seat is, as it were, a nick in that rim. A wooden seat on the edge of the cliff overlooks the wooded gorge below, to where, beyond the overlapping folds of hills,

Across the day,
Beyond their utmost purple rim,

the semicircle of giants of everlasting snow rear their virgin heads athwart the evening sky. So near and yet so far; so distinct, with lights and shadows falling on their peaks and pinnacles, and smooth sugar-loaf slopes! Not fringing the horizon like European snow-giants in

many a far-famed landscape, but towering above the surrounding panorama, a solemn array, marshaled on either hand as far as eye can reach. A silence and awe fell on the little group. The frivolous chatterers were hushed, the sensitive were too moved for words.

Then the illuminations began. Behind the group of spectators the sun sank, a fiery ball, into a semicircle of lurid sky, which it dyed with its departing beams in every shade of fire and glow. The snow range caught the reflection, and completed the circle of fire. The lower the sun sank, the more did the sunset repeat itself upon the sky above, and this again upon the snows.

We read, of wonderful fire fountains and lakes in the Antipodes. Here were mountains of fire, masses of burning hills, blazing luridly. But how soon it passed!

The brightness of the setting sun,
How soon they fade away!

Even as they watched night threw her dark mantle over the intervening hills and valleys, and, slowly and stealthily advancing, swallowed up the glow upon the snows, leaving them a ghastly gray. The contrast between their former warmth and their present whiteness was electrifying. Only the fleeting clouds above retained their fire, which enhanced the horror of the eternal coldness beneath them.

Hilda shuddered and drew on her cloak, for a chill breeze swept over the ridge.

"It's like looking on a corpse," she said.

"It's like my life," whispered Alan. He was sitting on the pole of the dandy. "That has been lit up a while with brightness, Now it will be cold and gray for evermore."

"The sun rises again."

"Not for me! For me there is but one sun, and after all its brightness was

not for me. It shines for another, and I, like the snows, only caught a reflected glow."

Hilda looked at him with eyes that longed to contradict him and dared not. Lacy interrupted them.

"Now, then, ladies and gentlemen, the curtain's down, the lights are put out. Shall we adjourn this meeting—that is if no one wants to get fever?"

Then he whispered maliciously to Hetty as he put her upon Mignonette.

"I'm not a poetic soul, but the snows almost put me in mind of nice sugary wedding-cake, and make my mouth water. Do they you?"

Hetty tossed her head.

"My mind doesn't run on wedding-cakes, and I am sure they are not in your line."

He gathered up her reins for her, and, as he put them into her hand, held it a second, with a meaning look.

"Do you remember the transformation scene in the desert? *I* shall never forget it."

Hetty blushed, and turned her head aside.

"I was very silly, I remember."

"So am I," he answered. "It's very easy for a certain person to make a fool of me."

Then they all went down the mountain side. The lake lay at their feet, a somber, darkening mass. The frogs began their monotonous chorus on the shore, and a tiny silvery crescent of the moon rose up suddenly behind the wooded heights of Aya Pata, standing out blackly against the still gleaming west.

A few hours later and the night of dark despair had fallen on Hilda's heart as she sat alone, face to face with her conscience. Her face was haggard, she was weary and stiff with her fall, but rest was impossible to her perturbed spirit. She wore a

hunted look of terror. Whither should she fly for protection? Who would save her from herself?

Over and over again a wild longing for forbidden happiness danced, like a will-o'-the-wisp, before her heated fancy, only to be crushed as she bitterly realized the present, and the weight of the fetters which dragged her down.

She sat, pen in hand, before a half-finished letter. A little bouquet of white wild jasmine and ferns Alan had plucked for her at the picnic loaded her every breath with its sweetness.

This was the letter :

DEAR MILES :

I am writing to ask you to let me come back to you, now that the rains are close at hand, and the worst of the heat is over. I am so well and strong now, I feel up to any pig-sticking or shooting expeditions in camp with you. Do tell me I may come. I should not ask it if I did not want to come very much. I am very miserable up here.

She re-read it, and a sudden impulse

seized her. She took the flowers and kissed them passionately. Then, drawing herself up to her full height, her lips tightly pressed, and with a great determination, she deliberately pulled the bouquet to pieces and threw the fragments into the grate.

Rapidly signing the letter, she addressed it, and called old Kodar Bux, the bearer, from his slumbers on a rug in the veranda. He straightened his elaborate white puggree on his head, and advanced sleepily.

"Send this letter at once to the post, and this one to the club by another man."

Then she wrote again :

DEAR MR. ADAYRE :

If we are to meet again it must be as *friends*. Everything that has happened and has been said to-day must be as if it had never been, otherwise I must lose you, and I have so few friends. I am probably going back to Punkahpore shortly.

HILDA.

Then she went to bed half dazed, like one who has been struck a heavy blow.

CHAPTER XIX.

A BOAT-RACE AND A SMASH.

A GREAT feature of the Simree season are the "weeks," when all her mightiest men at cricket, tennis, rowing, polo, shooting, and billiards do battle, sometimes against the neighboring garrison of Tubhato, or against a team sent up by some sporting regiment in the plains, only too glad of an excuse for ten days in the cool. But *the week par excellence*, transcending all others by the height of its party feeling and the betting on it, is that of "Soldiers *versus* Civil Service."

As Englishmen cannot do anything without eating over it, the civilians bade all the world with his wife and other people's to a monster picnic during the shooting match, and the soldiers, not to

be outdone in hospitality, sent out invitations for what was to be *the* ball of the season.

The first event to come off was that in which Hetty was most interested, the boat-race. That Jack-of-all-trades, Mr. Cramwell, had some difficulty in getting together a crew, and perforce impressed into the service a jolly old Eton boy, full of rowing reminiscences, but now, alas ! after a quarter of a century of India and close office work, weighing something on fifteen stone ! Early and late the crews trained, solemnly coached by an old colonel, who knew all about the lake, though he had never seen an English stream in his life.

In honor of Captain Lacy, Hetty dressed her crew with Eton blue round their straw hats and jerseys. Very pretty, too, they thought she looked, when she appeared on the landing-stage in a hat to match on her fair curls.

The crews stripped off their coats and took their places, greasing their rowlocks and their sliding seats. As they paddled slowly down to the start at the far end of the lake, opposite the Assembly Rooms, eager spectators lined the landing-stage and the mall under the willows, and even gathered on a coign of vantage under Smuggler's Rock. Groups of red soldiers made a dash of color among the white-clad natives. Enthusiastic partisans on ponies waited at the start to gallop down the mall alongside the boats and encourage them.

All this concourse and excitement made Hetty very nervous. But a few parting cautions from the coach and cheery words from her stroke, Lacy, encouraged her, and she brought her boat up well into position. A few minutes of suspense followed, which seemed like hours to the crew. Once or twice the starter from the shore moved one boat a

little ; and once, when he shouted those ominous words, " Are you ready ? " someone or other was busy giving a finishing touch to their stretcher.

But at last all was silence. The evening sun was slanting across the water, and lighting up the peak of Jacko, by which Hetty was to steer. The men were leaning forward, grasping their oars. All was ready.

A white puff of smoke from the bank, followed by the report of the gun, and the stroke shouted " Go ! "

Four oars dashed into the water, four backs bent to the strain, and the boat leaped forward.

Hetty in her anxiety hardly breathed. She grasped her rudder-strings tightly, and swayed to and fro with the boat, keeping her eyes intently fixed on the peak of Jacko and the gable of the Assembly Rooms, which were the points she had taken up. Once or

twice she dared to glance at the other boat.

The shouts of the galloping riders, the cheers of the spectators on the banks—"Well rowed, soldiers!" "Go it, civilians!" "Keep it up, Eton!"—contrasted strangely with the hush in the boat, broken only by the machine-like plash of the oars, and the terribly labored breathing of the crew.

Jack's face was dripping ; his lips were set. Hetty was afraid he was killing himself. One after another the various points on the shore flew by. Hetty now steered only by the gable.

Then the stroke gasped, "Spurt !" and Hetty's heart beat in time with the short hurried stroke they put on. They flew past the landing-stage ; a gun fired, and they stopped as if they had been shot, and hung in limp attitudes over their oars, while the boat glided on with the impetus.

Hetty looked round. The civilian boat was well behind.

She touched Jack's bare arm.

"Are you *very* done?"

He could only gasp and smile at her. What a hero he looked, with his bare sinewy arms and neck! What a proud girl she felt! (Poor Jim!)

The polo match came off next day. This was also a foregone conclusion for the soldiers, as Lacy was one of the best players of a regiment whose glory was polo, while the civilians found it difficult to get a team together at all. But celebrated old Joe Williamson, a commissioner of some twenty-five years' standing, galloped harder and hit straighter than many a younger man.

The Simree polo ground, all gravelly, and only two hundred by one hundred yards square, is hardly a model ground, and, moreover, at this season was terribly dusty. The ground outside the flags was

packed with spectators, soldiers, and natives from the bazaar—a very sporting lot in Simree; while all that was gallant and gay gathered on the terrace in front of the Assembly Rooms. In the center was enthroned fat old Lady Jenkins in a regal-looking jampan, with a background of scarlet attendants.

It was perhaps hardly strictly polo, but, nevertheless, it was an amusing game. Some of the ponies, excited with the unusual gallop after creeping about the hills, were evidently too much for their riders and made occasional dashes up the banks, spreading consternation among the ayahs and children. Alan Adayre, his plain white jersey and breeches showing off his slim, well-nit figure, was evidently, as he dashed about bareheaded, the little gray well in hand, the most brilliant player on the ground. Lacy, in his red-and-black 8th Lancer jersey and cap, was the most scientific per-

former, and played back, guarding his goal.

From the moment when Adayre and old Williamson crossed sticks over the ball in the center of the ground, and the former, sending it with a swinging stroke toward the civilian goal, dashed after it, Hetty thought she had never seen anything so exciting or so dangerous in her life. Her color came and went with each smart hit and turn, and she kept up a running fire of exclamations, mingled with abuse of the dust which hid so much of the game. All the time, however, she had not the remotest idea which side was winning, and when the first quarter of an hour was called, and ponies were changed, Hilda, who knew all about it and was watching it with more show of animation than her face usually expressed, had to explain the mysteries to her little friend.

When the fray recommenced, young Jones made a miss, and the civilians at

last scored a goal. The ball was thrown in, and old Williamson made a rush for it, followed closely by Adayre, trying to ride him down. Lacy came up in an opposite direction to get between Williamson and the goal, and they all met. The galloping ponies raised a great cloud of dust, and no one knew what happened next.

But there was a pause, a murmur, and a riderless pony galloped off the ground.

When the dust cleared away, there was to be seen a tangled mass of ponies and men on the ground. Old Williamson picked himself up, but a red and black jersey and a white one lay motionless under the kicking and struggling ponies. Then a crowd rushed in and closed round, and the spectators on the terrace saw no more.

Hilda's hand tightened on the handle of her parasol till her nails pierced her glove, and her face grew livid. But Hetty was not capable of such self-control, and,

with a piercing scream, she caught Hilda's arm.

"Oh! Jack! Jack! I know he's killed!"

Happily this little episode escaped notice in the general rush to see what had happened, and Hilda had time to drag Hetty away into a quiet corner of the library, where her overstrung feelings found vent in a hysterical burst of crying. Before Hilda could soothe her, Elinor hurried in to look for them, the bearer of good news. Things were not as bad as they had looked. Captain Lacy had only sprained his wrist badly, and Adayre had been temporarily stunned by a kick on the head from one of the ponies.

Then, and only then, Hilda seemed to awake from the tension of suspense, which made her feel and act as if she were a third person looking on at herself. She clutched at the back of a chair, and the room reeled before her.

But a little, wet, tear-stained cheek was laid against her cold one, and a little voice whispered :

“ Darling, don’t you hear ? He’s not badly hurt ! ”

Hilda drew herself up and became her own proud self again.

“ Elinor, hadn’t you better take Hetty home ? I’ll follow you directly. ”

It had been previously arranged that the three were to dine together at Crag Cottage after the match, and go on to some theatricals which were to take place in the Assembly Rooms that evening.

But, as Hilda stepped out of the Rooms to find Kohinoor, a groom met her with the message that Captain Lacy wanted to speak to her. So she went across the now deserted polo-ground, where they were removing the gay little flags that had marked the bounds, and where little knots of spectators were dis-

cussing the accident ; Kohinoor led after her.

Hilda found Lacy sitting on a chair in the pavilion, and a doctor finishing bandaging his wounded wrist. He himself was emptying a stiff "peg" to pull himself together.

"What an unluckly finale, Captain Lacy!" she began, the men standing around making room for her to come up to him.

"Oh, I'm all right now, Mrs. Cranston," he returned cheerily ; "but, as bad luck will have it, it's my bridle arm, and I suppose I shan't be up to much for some time. But," he added, lowering his voice, "I wanted to let you know the truth about Adayre. He's been regularly knocked out of time and, they say, has just escaped bad concussion of the brain. But he's come to all right, and they can't find any damage. I can't think how it happened," he continued. "I suppose it

was that infernal dust. I know I couldn't see a yard in front of me, and then they both seemed to gallop on to the top of me. They've carried Adayre over to the club, and I'm going to follow him there now. I'll send word presently to say how he is."

"Thank you," said Hilda simply, holding out her hand. He took it, and felt a slight pressure.

Then she mounted her Arab without any help, and cantered off.

"By George!" said young Jones, looking after her, "women are rum things. I thought she was spoony on Adayre, but she don't seem to care a d—— about his being hurt."

"Humph! I'm not so sure of that," muttered Lacy to himself, remembering the pressure of her hand.

"My deah fellah," drawled Cramwell, "I've been studying the sex—ah—all my life, and some are perfectly inscrutable,

and Mrs. Cranston's one of them. But, by Jove ! that woman's a stunning figure," he added, putting up his eyeglass to survey the retreating form.

CHAPTER XX.

“IT’S NOT TOO LATE.”

THOUGH he had not said it in so many words, Hilda knew perfectly well that Lacy intended her to convey the news of his well-being to Hetty. So she went on her way to Crag Cottage.

After the exciting event of the afternoon none of the party felt equal to going out again, and it was unanimously agreed to give up the theatricals. Elinor soon disappeared to bed, and the other two sat out in long chairs in the veranda.

It was a balmy Indian night, not too hot or too cold. A half-moon shed a mellow light over lake and mountain, casting inky shadows. Fire-flies glanced in the trees, and frogs croaked on the shore. The cricket tribe kept up an un-

ceasing undercurrent of chirping. Down below from the lighted Assembly Rooms came ever and anon a sound of music, and lanterns twinkled in the bazaar and on the hillsides.

But each girl preferred to lie back and gaze at the star-strewn heavens, occupied with her own thoughts, which were none of the brightest. Each, perhaps, hoped to gain some peace from contemplation of those silent wonders, which twinkle on so calmly, undisturbed by the stir and passions of the world below.

At last, after a long silence, Hilda rose, and, seating herself on the end of Hetty's spider-chair, took a white little hand in hers, and bent down over the fair face. She wanted to speak seriously to the girl, and this was her opportunity.

"Hetty, darling," she began, "I *must* talk to you, and I want you not to be angry with what I am going to say. I do not get easily fond of people, but you

—you are like a dear little sister to me, and that's why I want to speak seriously to you ; for, Hetty, I see you're going to make a fearful mess of your life. You are engaged, I know, to a very good fellow, who is devoted to you, and whom I know you mean to marry. Yet all the time you know perfectly well you care a hundred times more for someone else. Yes, Hetty, it's true, and it's no use denying it ! If I had not noticed it before, I must have done so to-day, when you betrayed yourself by your alarm when Captain Lacy was hurt.

“I'm not going to scold you, Hetty. I don't blame you ; only hear me out. It's not entirely your fault. You were very young when you became engaged to Mr. Sherringham, and I daresay you honestly thought you cared for him, as a girl should care for the man she means to marry. But you simply did not know what love was. It is now a long time

since you met. You are older, more experienced. The one great passion which, sooner or later, comes into every man's and woman's life has swept over you, Hetty. And, thank God, for *you* it has not come too late! And that's why, dear child, I'm speaking to you to-night. I see you standing on the brink of an abyss of lifelong misery, and I want to draw you back."

Hetty moaned aloud.

"But what am I to do?" she cried. "I can't help caring about him, you know I can't! I know it's very wrong, but he's different to anyone I ever met before. I wouldn't hurt Jim for worlds. He's good and true, and so fond of me, who am not nearly good enough for him. But he's not like the other!"

Hilda sighed.

"My poor Hetty! Let me be very frank with you. Let me tell you about myself. Perhaps it will be a warning to

you. When I was very young I met a man who was kind to me, and whom I liked and respected. I did not love him as real love goes, but—I married him. Ever since my life has been a burden to me. Too late I found out my mistake—my fatal mistake. Love is everything in a woman's life; she can't get on without it. Men are so different, their lives are so much fuller, with their work, their ambition, And I want to save you, Hetty, from the misery I am now undergoing. I am not so much older than you, but I am aged in suffering. My life has not been a happy one," she continued, leaning her chin on her hand, and gazing out into the night with dreamy eyes. "I had no happy home, no fond parents and sister like you. It is a joyless, sunless life being bound to a man you do not care for; how much more when you *do* care——" She broke off, and her voice sank.

Hetty's arms were round her in a minute, and she kissed her tenderly.

There was a tearful silence for awhile, which was interrupted by a servant with a pencil note to Hilda from Lacy, saying that Adayre was quite himself again, though shaken, and hoped to be all right in a day or two.

The night air blew chill from the mountains, and Hilda called for her jampan, and rose to go home.

"Dear little Hetty!" she thought to herself, as she was borne away into the darkness. "Ah, Jack Lacy, you've much to answer for! What selfish wretches men are—mostly."

As she added this reservation she felt for a letter in her pocket, and a softer look came over her face. It was from Adayre in answer to the one she had sent him the night after the Jacko picnic. She had carried it about ever since, like a talisman.

It ran :

MY DEAR MRS. CRANSTON :

Of course it shall be as you wish, however hard your order. But I will do anything rather than not see you, and so *ever* your friend,

A. A.

She stuck it into her bosom, and it seemed more precious to her than ever, as she was carried home under the stars. He might not be well enough for them to meet again before she returned to Punkahpore; these were, perhaps, his last words. A chill came over her heart at the thought. But she gathered up her courage.

"After all, what can it matter?" she thought bitterly. "Here or there, present or absent, he can never be anything to me but what he is. Nothing can be altered. I must accept my fate."

When she reached home Hilda felt

wearied out with the mingled emotions of the day. But

Sorrows, not as single spies,
But in battalions come.

A letter from her husband was awaiting her on the table. She sat awhile, not daring to open it, yet longing to know her fate. At last she read:

DEAR HILDA :

You must be quite mad to want to come down here now. The glass is at ninety-three degrees as I write, and you would be dead in a week. Besides, I don't want you at all. I'm out two days a week after pigs. Had a splendid day yesterday on Blueskin. Directly the rains break I'm going to take ten days out in the Swammee district after the buck, and you couldn't come—you would knock up. If you want another check write and say so.

Your affectionate husband,

MILES CRANSTON.

Hilda sat, numbed and stunned, with this epistle in her hand. This, then, was her reward for trying to do her duty and to flee temptation. Miles did not want her. He discarded her, and he left her

to her fate! How cold, how unsympathetic, how matter-of-fact was his answer to her earnest entreaty to be allowed to return to him! How little he understood her!

Yet, doubtless, he imagined he was doing all that could possibly be required of him in advising her to remain out of the heat, and in providing her with the funds to do so.

But was it money she wanted? Poor hungry heart! She asked for love: he offered her a check! Would Alan have answered like that had she offered to come to him? But she had sealed his lips, spurned his offer of love, and her husband, to whom she turned for protection, politely declined her society! She felt utterly forsaken and helpless.

Suddenly a wild feeling of resentment to Miles overcame her. She seized a pen to write a line which should bring Alan to her, hurt or sound. After all,

love was everything. She was not to blame, she argued. She had tried to resist her fate, had attempted to do her duty. Now she would struggle no longer. She would seize the happiness which lay within her grasp.

But, as she took up her pen, her eye fell on her mother's portrait, which stood on her writing-table. That mother, whom she had never known, seemed to gaze at her with soft pleading eyes. It was a lovely picture, taken a few months before the death of the original, when she was less than Hilda's present age. Tucked into a corner of the frame, under the glass, was a tiny lock of soft fair hair, which Elinor had cut for her off her baby's head before they laid him in his coffin.

Something in the sight of the picture and the lock seemed to arrest her, to touch a chord in her heart. Flinging herself down before the portrait, she burst

into a wild flood of tears, all her anger and passion turned to shame and remorse.

"Mother! mother!" she sobbed, "if you can hear me, hear me, and save me!"

Ah! she thought bitterly, if her mother had lived to love and guide her, how different her life would have been. But this sweet young mother early escaped all the trouble of this wicked world.

"And then," she sobbed, "my boy went too! Oh, why was I not taken? Why was I left all alone to fall so low, to become, through no fault of my own, nearly as wicked and miserable a woman as those here I pretend to despise! Oh, horror, I am no better than these horrid fast women with their lovers! What was I about to do? Oh, if I could but die, like my mother! Those whom the gods love die young."

Then her thoughts went back to her baby boy. Perhaps, had he lived, Miles would have loved her through him; and she, oh, what a wealth of love would she not have lavished on him!

But if the dear ones gone before can look down on those they have left behind, what must that sweet mother in Paradise have thought of her child? She, Hilda, so proud, so haughty, so scornful of the folly and sin she saw around her, was she better than others?

"Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall," came into her mind, and in her shame and her despair she bowed her head and prayed as she had never prayed since her baby died: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

CHAPTER XXI.

IN AN INDIAN BALLROOM.

CAPTAIN LACY'S sprained wrist prevented his joining in the next event, the cricket match, and conducted to the victory the civilians gained thereat. Hetty had a headache, Hilda was weary, and neither went down to see Mr. Cramwell slogging away for nearly a hundred runs. But Jack came down, looking interesting, with his arm in a sling, and was made much of by the ladies, doing the wounded hero admirably. The doctors kept Adayre in his room.

Three days later was the soldiers' ball. Lacy, as president of the ball committee, superintended an active army of volunteers of both sexes, who arranged the supper-room and the decorations. A

double row of coolies, each armed with a bottle, bottled the floor up and down industriously (as long as anyone looked after them) to make it slippery.

Thanks to everyone's exertions, the Assembly Rooms presented a completely transformed appearance the night of the dance. The bare whitewashed walls were adorned with mirrors embedded in flowers, while graceful trophies of waving bamboos and ferns filled up the corners. The little stage whereon, a few nights since, the amateurs of Simree had disported themselves, was arranged as a drawing-room, whence Lady Jenkins and the eagle eyes of the chaperons could survey what went on below. In the dim light of the veranda, and in sundry other dark nooks (in Simree slang, "Kala-juggers," or "Kissee-ke-waste"), chairs were arranged in twos and twos.

Long before the hour named on the cards the lanterns escorting the beauty

and fashion of Simree twinkled about the hillsides converging on the Assembly Rooms. At Indian balls people like to get their full share of dancing, and it is *chic*, and shows you are popular, to arrive with your card nearly full. But then a long programme of twenty-four dances is often only divided among some half-dozen pet partners, for everyone knows everyone else, and how everyone dances.

As Hilda, in her black dress sparkling with her mother's diamonds, and Hetty, in some foamy white material, without a scrap of color, entered the room, they created some sensation at this their first Simree ball. The rooms were gaudy with every color and style of uniform, from the brilliant gold and scarlet of the staff to the pale blue and silver of the Madras Cavalry, and the livery-like drab of some Native Infantry corps.

For the first time Hetty beheld Lacy in full war-paint, as, in consequence of

the temporary nature of his appointment as A. D. C., he did not wear staff uniform. He was gorgeous in masses of bullion, an elaborate silver belt, with the battles of the regiment engraved on it, and with reminiscences of olden time in the shape of little silver pistol-picks, and his nether man was encased in tights and high Hessian boots with gold bosses at the knee. Alan Adayre showed how well the Horse Artillery uniform, with its short stable-jacket, can look on a tall, well-made man, and some fat old colonels of the corps kindly served as foils to him.

As a preliminary canter to the state Lancers, which was to open the ball, one of the best string bands in India struck up "My Queen." Lacy sauntered up to Hetty, with whom he had not previously arranged any dances.

"Let me see what you've got left," said he, coolly taking her card from her. "You'll be tired if you dance all night."

You'd better sit out a few with me, and go in to supper with me. I've got a jolly table."

Whereupon he actually put himself down with a big "J" for about every third dance. In vain Hetty half-heartedly protested, saying Hilda would not stay late.

"Nonsense!" whispered Jack, looking at her mischievously; "I'm one of the hosts, miss, and it would be a pity if we couldn't do as we like! Besides, who knows what may happen to you before another ball? And you know you don't *really* mind. I've not begun to bore you yet, have I? And then I've got a surprise in store for you later on!" And he turned away, before she could object any more, to arm some "big lady" to the solemn Lancers.

Sir Joseph, looking profoundly bored, shambled through the figures with our old friend Mrs. Postlethwaite, just arrived

at Simree, and in the seventh heaven of delight at being the "seniorest" lady present, after Lady Jenkins. This latter danced with the baldest and fattest colonel in the room, the circumference of whose sword-belt was a sight for gods and men, and did all her steps and "balancez'd" as she had been taught in her youth. With great presence of mind Lacy had got hold of Mrs. Hambleton. He was not really "senior" enough for her, but he knew she would prefer him as a partner to a wizened senior member of Council who only opened his mouth to eat. Then the set wanted enlivening, which Jack certainly did with a vengeance. He looked unutterable things at the old ladies, and squeezed their hands, and made them giggle. He encouraged all the old boys to stamp at the proper places, and, finally, in the middle figure when the men revolve round their partners, he crammed on the pace so that one

old colonel couldn't keep up, and, breaking loose, went bounding against the wall like an indiarubber ball. Of course, all this was not at all dignified in a "senior" Lancers. When it was over he carried off Mrs. Hambleton into a corner, and convulsed her with the last new story from the club.

Then the first waltz began. "Sweet dreamland faces" sent an eager thrill of excitement into many hearts. Adayre came up to Hilda.

"You said you would give me the first. But do as you like. I shan't dance with anyone else to-night."

After all, Hilda was young, and loved dancing. It was a long time since a soul-stirring waltz had rung in her ears; the floor at her feet looked inviting, and Adayre beseeching. The stern resolutions with which she had entered the room vanished before the fond low tone of his voice and his yearning eyes. For

all answer she placed her arm in his, and they floated off.

People watched them, and remarked how well they went together. And, indeed, Alan's height matched well with Hilda's, and his step was perfection, neither a romp nor a crawl. A sigh of satisfaction from Alan stirred the hair on Hilda's temple. His hand involuntarily tightened its grasp as he murmured :

“ I've been longing for this for weeks.”

Meanwhile, Lacy had gone off to cheer Mrs. St. Clair on her first appearance in Simree society. Not aware of Anglo-Indian punctuality, she had arrived late, to find everyone engaged and herself relegated to the daïs with Mrs. Postlethwaite and that ilk. Lacy found her looking somewhat washed out with heat, in spite of her rouge, and scornfully surveying the scene.

“ Yes, of course, it *is* a blessing to be in the cool. I thought I should have

died. My hair wouldn't curl, and I got as yellow as a guinea. I told the major that unless he wanted an old and ugly hag for a wife, he was to send me away at once. But what a place this is! What do you do with yourself among these people, Jack? Oh, I see, monsieur! There's that little girl who was in my cabin. Really quite a decent frock! Did you ever see anything like the women's clothes? Are they *all* made in the verandas by cross-legged native tailors? They're all too short and too high. And the dancing? Do look at that man chandeliering in the Argyle style, and that one wheel-barrowing his partner up and down in front of him. It would seem, too, the banjo style of holding your partner still obtains here."

"Indeed, yes! And there's another style quite peculiar to Simree. Do see that girl holding her partner's arm as

if she were tickling him under the armpit?"

"But there's a couple who can dance. That tall woman in black with the good-looking man. Oh, that's Hilda d'Arcy! Mrs. Cranston, is she? Well, you must introduce me. It's quite a relief to see someone one knows something about—in one's own set. Who's the man? Adayre? Adayre? One of the Cumberland Adayres?"

Mrs. St. Clair had a little weakness for territorial designations. She liked all her acquaintance to belong to some county. People who had no "place" anywhere were sure to be dreadfully *parvenu*, she argued. Failing that, she would put up with a good double-barreled name.

"Yes, he's very good-looking. You may introduce him. What? no use, you say? Well, I'm not surprised, for she certainly is very handsome, and would

pass muster even at home. I'm sure, out here, neither age, nor size, nor want of beauty is a bar to success. If some of these women had their half-grown daughters about them, they would feel the difference. Children tell such cruel tales of age. I'm glad I've none."

When the dance came to an end Adayre carried Hilda off into the veranda overlooking the lake. He threw himself into an easy-chair, and she sat leaning over the railing drinking in the loveliness of the moonlit scene. For a long time neither spoke; he gazed at the chiseled features showing white against the dark background. Presently another waltz began, the plaintive German Volkslied, "Den lieben langen Tag." Instantly the long veranda became deserted.

"Don't move," pleaded Alan, rising at a movement of Hilda's, and leaning over the rail by her side. "Tell me, now that we can talk without being over-

heard, what is this about your going away?"

"Nothing," she answered bitterly. "Miles won't have me," and she handed him her husband's letter.

He read it through twice under a lamp, his face darkening, and returned it to her muttering something about pearls before swine. Then he looked silently into the dark waters for some moments. A light night-breeze ruffled the surface of the lake, and the moon was shaded by a passing cloud. Without turning his head, he asked in a low voice :

"Did you want to go?"

No answer. The proud head bent lower, and the long lashes drooped over the eyes.

"You thought you ought to go? Was that it?"

No answer. He turned and looked her full in the face, saying earnestly :

"Is this our compact? Is this *your*

friendship? Are you afraid to trust me? O Hilda, how little you understand my devotion! Do you know if you bade me only see you once a week, only speak to you once a month, I would keep to it. I would silently worship you, and stand by smothering my deeper feeling; be ready to help you, should you need it. Indeed, I wish to be the friend you so much need. And you try to run away from me?"

Hilda looked up, and putting her hand in his, pressed it.

"Thank you, my friend indeed. I understand you better now," she murmured. "And now take me back."

In a corner by the door they passed Hetty, lying back in a chair a great deal too big for her, with her white shoes dangling childishly; while the greater part of her figure and Lacy's face was hidden by a huge white fan he held in front of her.

"I *must* speak to Captain Lacy," said Hilda, noticing this. "He's behaving cruelly to that child, and I am so fond of her."

"I'm afraid you'll do no good. He's only amusing himself; it's Lacy's way. Men think only of the moment's fun."

"*Some* men," added Hilda; and the claimant for the next dance came up and whirled her off, while Adayre stood leaning against the door and watched her.

Presently, when Hilda stood up in the Lancers with Lacy, she boldly began her say.

"Captain Lacy, I hope you won't mind my speaking to you, but I'm too fond of Hetty not to feel obliged to tell you that you're behaving very badly."

"That's just what Mrs. St. Clair has been telling me," fenced Jack imperturbably, with a shrug of his shoulders. "In fact, that's what everybody has always

been telling me all my life. I've always been a naughty boy, and always behaved badly, Mrs. Cranston. Why, at Eton, I was more flogged than any boy of my time. There was a large expenditure of birches on my account."

Hilda couldn't help laughing, but returned to the charge.

"You know quite well what I mean, Captain Lacy. It's not fair to a girl whose life is fixed to endeavor to unsettle her as you are doing."

"I'm really very sorry," he began penitently. "No," he corrected, "I'm not sorry at all. I enjoy behaving badly always, and in this case in particular. It's not my fault. What's a poor devil of a younger son like me to do? And as for Mademoiselle Hetty, I don't know that her life buried down at a hole like Bulamabad will be so very cheerful that you should grudge her a little fun up here before she settles down."

"Ah, *if* she settles down after this? That's the question."

But the dance began, and any chance of further conversation was at an end. But Hilda felt she had done no good.

CHAPTER XXII.

A sigh too much and a kiss too long,
And there follows a mist and a weeping rain,
And life is never the same again.

—*George Macdonald.*

SUPPER is an important event at an Indian ball. The guests file in solemnly in due order of precedence, and sit down to make a square, not to say an octagonal, meal. Toasts and speeches often take place. Sometimes, as at the dance in question, the various tables are supplied by the ladies of the station, who vie with each other as to whose board shall be loaded with the most inviting viands.

On this occasion one of the fat colonels' wives had sent what she fondly imagined to be the crowning glory of the feast, in the shape of a gigantic saddle of

mutton, which had been fattening for a twelvemonth.

Hetty had a merry meal with Captain Lacy, with a cheery party at a round table in a snug corner. But champagne loosens tongues, and after supper came trouble for Hetty. Young Jones had waxed more and more tender and melancholy during the two dances he had had with Hetty, and, after the supper extra, the latter in fear and trembling proposed they should sit in the well-lighted ball-room instead of the dangerously dim veranda. But young Jones was not going to be put off.

"Miss Mainwaring," he began, lugubriously, "I must speak to you. My leave is up in two days, but I can't go without telling you what you must know already——"

"Oh! please, Mr. Jones," she interrupted, "don't go on. It's no use, you know."

"Yes; I know it's no use," persisted the poor boy dismally. "But, all the same, you must have seen how awfully spoony I am on you. I can't help it; it's been growing on me for weeks, and there may be a chance——"

"No, no; there's no chance, I assure you. You must know I'm engaged."

"Indeed I do. But there seems a chance for other people; why shouldn't there be for me? No one *can* care for you like I do. O Miss Mainwaring——"

"But there's no chance for you, or anyone else. Please stop. I'm sure I never intended to lead you to think——"

"No, indeed, it's very little encouragement you've given me," he urged bitterly. "I've been very bold to speak to you at all, but I couldn't help it. If a fellow sees other fellows—of course I know I'm only a poor Native Infantry sub, not a swaggering Hussar, for whom

there might be a chance," he added angrily.

"Mr. Jones," said Hetty, rising, with all the offended majesty of five feet one, "you're very rude; you don't know what you're saying. I've given you your answer; please take me back to my chaperon," and she went and seated herself under Mrs. Postlethwaite's wing, while he turned and went back to his hotel in a rage.

The next dance was Mr. Cramwell's, and Hetty, to her horror, discovered that he, too, was waxing sentimental, and inclined to make love. What a bother she thought these men! In vain she edged away from him, and answered coldly in monosyllables. He was too much used to conquest to be easily repulsed, and continued to pour into her ears the honeyed flatteries, the half-veiled declarations, which the Simree damsels usually found very acceptable. Finally,

after quoting a few fervid lines from Byron, and glancing stealthily round to see if they were unnoticed, he seized her hand and tried to kiss it. Hetty shook herself free indignantly.

"Please, Mr. Cramwell, don't go on like that. It's not funny, and doesn't amuse me one bit. You can say all that to girls who are free, and not engaged to another man."

"Engagements don't count for much in *this* favored spot," he answered, with a deprecating shrug. "And, pray, why should I fear to tread where bolder men step in? Is it because I wear a black coat instead of a smart uniform?"

"I don't understand you. There's another dance beginning, let's go back," said Hetty crossly, and again she took refuge with Mrs. Postlethwaite.

These two little episodes hurt and annoyed her. What did these men mean

by sneering at her engagement, by their allusions to Jack? It was all very horrid. Was it, indeed, true and patent to other people, though she hardly confessed it to herself, that Jack was on a different footing with her to everyone else, not excepting Jim? Oh, the shame of it all! What a gossiping place this was! What had she done to get herself thus talked about, and to lead people to believe they could make love to her with impunity? She felt that she hated them all—that there was only one person she liked, and who understood her. Then she remembered it was his dance. How long he was coming for it.

She felt so hurt and ashamed and unhappy that a mist gathered in her eyes over the gay ballroom. Jack appeared.

“Oh, I’m so glad you’ve come! People are so tiresome. I’ve been so annoyed!”

"Indeed, and whose head shall I punch?" he inquired, smiling.

Hetty gave a little hysterical laugh that sounded more like crying.

"Come along," said Jack hurriedly, "all the old cats are eying you! Now open your mouth and shut your eyes, and prepare for a great surprise, as the children say. No, I don't mean that exactly, but come out here; I've brought your cloak."

He led her out into the portico, and flung the cloak on her shoulders, drawing the hood over her fair hair.

"Where are you going to take me?" she asked naturally.

"Out for a moonlight paddle. I've got the Government House canoe tied up close by."

"But how can you paddle with your bad wrist?"

"Don't raise objections, you little Eskimo! There, I don't think you'll

catch cold now," and he tucked her under his arm, and led her down to the water's edge.

It was the Canadian "dugout," which held three easily, though, as a rule, it was only required for two. Jack arranged the cushions, and tucked in Hetty with a rug. Then he paddled out a short distance on to the lake and stopped.

It might have been between one and two o'clock, and it was a heavenly night. We in our northern climes can hardly realize the subtle fascination of these Indian moonlight nights. Shakespeare must have had them in his mind's eye when he painted Lorenzo's meeting with Jessica, or his fairies' revels. They even transform the hideous landscape of the plains with their unearthly light and shadow. How much more intense the charm they cast over the fair lake at Simree! The only pity is that the moon is not turned on permanently.

The strains of waltzes floating over the water from the Assembly Rooms, all ablaze, gave the finishing glamour to the scene. Under the shed the occasional stamp of a patient pony, or the cough of a slumbering jampannee, dreaming of rice, or pice, reminded the two of the realistic world. From the far end of the lake the convent bell rang out the hour.

"And now," said Jack, putting down his paddle and leaning over to her, "tell me what has annoyed you, Hetty?"

"Oh, I don't know. Mr. Jones is——"

"Young Jones is an ass?"

"And then Mr. Cramwell, too? I can't help people liking me, but it's very annoying, I wish they wouldn't."

"But *I* like you!" (meaningly). "Am I annoying?"

"Oh, no! you're different."

"Am I, Hetty—*really* and *truly*? I'm so glad!"

"And they said nasty things about my being engaged; and I can't help that either!"

And those unlucky tears of hers, always so near the surface, began to flow. In an instant Jack, in some marvelous way, had got close up to her.

"Take care," she cried, "you'll upset us!"

The canoe certainly gave a lurch, and she clung to him.

"It's all right," he answered, slipping an arm round her for protection; "I'll take care of you. But please don't cry, Hetty, dearest little girl! I can't bear to see you cry. Do you remember when you cried before in the canal after we had quarreled? It made me miserably. Do stop!" as she sobbed helplessly.

"You don't like me to be miserable, do you, Hetty. For you *do* like me a little bit, don't you? I *am* different to

the others [getting hold of her hand]; you said I was, you know. I'm sure you *do* like me?"

For the life of her she couldn't help it. She looked up, her answer shining in her eyes.

"You little darling!" he murmured softly, drawing the little fair head down on his shoulder, and covering the little wet face with kisses.

Hetty freed herself instantly with a cry.

"O Jack! Jack! You mustn't! It's very wrong! How could you! Oh, take me back!" she cried wildly. "What a faithless girl I am! I wish I'd never seen you!"

And she burst into such an uncontrollable fit of hysterical weeping that Jack could do absolutely nothing with her but paddle her back to shore.

There she implored him to get her her dandy—for she felt quite unequal to go-

ing back to the ballroom—and to tell Hilda she had gone home.

“Won’t you even say good-night?” he asked, bending over her as he arranged her rug, and trying to take her hand.

For all answer she covered her face with her hands.

“O Jack! Jack!” she moaned reproachfully.

The men lifted her up, and she was borne away out of his sight. Jack stood looking after her, and actually gave a little sigh.

Then he pulled himself together.

“Come, old man, this won’t do!” he said to himself as he lit a cigar and strolled off to find his pony, and go home too.

His absence at the end of the ball was noticed and commented on by the *jeunesse dorée* who sat down to second supper about dawn; and much chaff at his ex-

pense, that was neither particularly witty nor refined, emanated from the champagne-laden brain-cavities of these gay spirits.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AFTER THE WILY BOAR.

EARLY one Sunday morning, a few days after the soldiers' ball at Simree, a group of horsemen of the Bulamabad Tent Club were standing in a low dāk jungle surveying with intense satisfaction the death struggles of a fine boar, to which one of them, dismounted, was giving the *coup de grâce*.

The poor brute, with two spears stuck in him, defiant and dangerous to the last and foaming at the mouth, had been caught in a prickly thorn bush by the spears in him. Jim Sherringham, on foot, was bearding him, and, watching his opportunity, thrust a well-aimed blow right into his heart. He was a fine boar indeed, weighing nearly two hundred pounds with

great tusks, and bristles like wire. He had given them a good run, too. Right away from the island in the old dry bed of the Jumna, one of the best hot weather preserves of the club, and whence the beaters had dislodged him at sunrise, he had taken them at a rattling pace across the sands, and been lost awhile in a palm jungle. But Colonel Cranston had come up with him, squatted on his haunches, under a tree. With a view halloo, which brought up Sherringham on his smart little gray Arab, he followed piggy across some crops till some treacherous melon beds brought him to grief. In some high grass Sherringham came up with the boar, and had a job at him. But the Arab swerved at the critical moment, and Sherringham missed. The pig "jinked" (turned) and lolloped off at right angles, in an ungainly fashion, over a deep eight feet drain, and the rest of the party came up, Colonel Cranston rode at him, and got

first spear off him, but leaving the spear in. Piggy was now very sick, and his pace slackened. He led his pursuers through some scrub, receiving several wounds, and charging desperately at each blow. Finally he took refuge in the bush where we have seen him put *hors de combat*.

Though it was still early morning, the sun began to pour down with a pitiless scorching heat on the steaming horses and the perspiring sportsmen, encased though the latter were in an armor of helmets and curtains and paddings down their spines. The parched plain around shimmered in the glare, and the noontide burning wind began to blow up. Consequently there was much rejoicing when the "peg" elephant hove in sight at a shambling trot, and the white-robed servant on his back began to concoct and dispense brandies-and-sodas.

Thus refreshed, and lighting cigars and

mounting fresh horses, the party returned to the beating elephants and coolies, which were sent in to draw a fresh preserve of tall elephant grass, with much uncouth noise. But vainly did the sportsmen wait at the far end of the covert for the pig to emerge. Antelopes bounded out and leapt across the plain, safe for once from rifles. Peacocks flew screaming away and ground game scuttled out, but piggy was not at home. After another covert had similarly been beaten blank, it was unanimously agreed that it was too hot to remain out any longer, and there was a general scamper across country in the direction of the white camp under the mango grove.

"So you are really open to an offer for the gray?" asked Nelson, the indigo-planter, of Sherringham, as they cantered together. "If so, I'm your man."

"Well, I'm afraid I must let her go. When a fellow's going into double-har-

ness he must pull in his horns. Of course I shall miss her, for the country-bred is not staunch like the Arab, and I've sent the pony to the hills. But, after all, life's not made up of pig-sticking, and I've a good time coming," he added cheerily, slapping the Arab on her neck and giving a whoo-whoop out of sheer high spirits.

"Yes, indeed," remarked Nelson, "I hear she's lovely." But he was not referring to the mare.

"Lovely!" cried Sherringham; "she's just the sweetest—— However, I hope you'll judge for yourself next cold weather, when we are out in camp near your place. Here we are, and I'm not sorry! It's almost too late to be out. I wonder when the rains *are* coming?"

As Jim entered his tent, a glass in it would have marked about 108 degrees. To him, however, it seemed delightfully

cool after the furnace-like atmosphere without. He flung himself down in a great armchair that would have held a giant, and, sprawling out his legs on the broad arms, called for a peg.

While he plunged his head into a big iced tumbler, another servant pulled off his boots and proceeded to divest him of his superfluous clothing; for in India no able-bodied man thinks of dressing or undressing himself, and is mostly rubbed down, as he comes out of his tub, like a horse.

Jim's next inquiry was if the post-coolie had come out from Bulamabad. This produced a pile of mostly official letters in long envelopes. But his face lighted up with a rare smile that made him almost good-looking as he came across a square-tinted envelope directed in a woman's hand.

"Dear little girl! What an age it seems since I saw her first!" and he

turned the letter over lovingly, and opened it.

He read it through once with a muttered exclamation of surprise, and looked up with a dazed expression. Then he took it to the tent-door, and read it again in a better light. Coming back, he picked up the cover and examined it. As he did so, his eye fell on another letter in Elinor's handwriting. He clutched eagerly at this—it was a long one—and read it through hurriedly. Then he went back to the first letter, and, reading it yet once more, let them both drop, and, burying his face in his hands, gave a smothered groan of "Oh! my God!"

Three times the old bearer peeped in from the opening into the bathroom, first to announce that the sahib's tub was ready, and next with the information that it was getting cold. At the third interruption Jim stirred, and consigned the

old servant to a place commonly supposed to be even hotter than Bulamabad was at that season. The old man withdrew hurriedly, and discussed with the others as to what might be the matter with the sahib. He had been in Jim's service ever since the latter had joined as a *griff*, and could count the times his master had sworn at him, which spoke volumes for Jim's temper.

Presently the table-servant braved the sahib's wrath, and remarked to the protector of the poor, etc., that the other sahibs were sitting down to breakfast in the mess-tent. He was curtly informed that his master would not eat breakfast, and the latter now roused himself with a sigh like one awaking from an unpleasant dream. He pulled himself together with a mighty effort, and unlocked his desk. Out of a fold of tissue-paper he drew a sweet photograph, colored, of Hetty in a swing. Pressing it passionately to his

lips, Jim flung himself on his bed and buried his face in the pillows with something that sounded like a sob.

Just then Nelson's voice sounded, coming across from his tent.

"I say, Sherringham, will you take eight hundred [rupees] for the gray?"

He came in, clad only in a jersey, white drill breeches, and an enormous pith hat.

"Hullo, old man! what's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing!" muttered Jim, from his pillow. "Touch of the sun—or something. I'll be all right if I'm left alone! But, Nelson," he shouted, as the latter left the tent. "I don't want to part with the gray, now!"

This was the first letter which lay on the carpet:

JIM:

I don't know how to write to you, but yet I feel I should be doing you a great wrong if I did not. But I dread grieving you, as I know you will be grieved when I tell you I can't marry you. I feel I do not love you as I ought to love my husband that is to be. I'm a foolish, wicked,

ungrateful girl, as I am treating you very badly ; but, in the end, I'm sure it is the right thing to do. So don't think more harshly than you can help of your miserable

HETTY.

Elinor's letter was much longer. She was torn in pieces between shame and regret at Hetty's faithlessness, and sorrow for Jim, and a sisterly wish to exonerate as far as possible the beloved author of all this misery. Her letter was full of pleading for the latter, of commiseration for the former. It ran :

I feel so ashamed I hardly dare write to you. To think, after all your faithful waiting, Hetty should write to you the letter she has just shown me ! How I blame myself for not having looked after her more ! You know how young, how impulsive, Hetty is. Of course there is someone else in the background ; I will not attempt to conceal it from you. But I am convinced he is only amusing himself, which makes it all the more sad. I do not want to delude you with any vain hopes, for Hetty has only arrived at this lamentable decision after some days of much mental suffering, and she is acting only from a strong sense that it is the right thing to do to release you. I am too happily married myself to dare to argue her into a

marriage without affection, and all I can do is to entreat your forgiveness of her conduct, and to plead, in extenuation of it, her youth when you were first engaged, nearly two years ago now, and the alterations, the maturing of her feelings, time may have wrought. She is so simple-minded, so ignorant of the world, that she has got it firmly fixed into her head that she would be doing you a great injustice if she married you ; and what can I say to that, my poor faithful Jim, whom I had already learnt to look upon as a brother ?

I know your first impulse will be to rush up here at all hazards, and to try and win her back. But I am convinced that in so doing you would only harden her in her present line of conduct ; and, moreover, she would probably refuse to see you. I can only urge patience. In the very fact that she feels so keenly wounding your feelings I see a faint spark of hope.

She is quite ill with all this wretched business, and we are going away on a marching trip into the hills when Charley comes up on leave to-morrow. I hope it will do her good ; in any case it will get her away from this place, where I wish she had never come.

Do, Jim, be guided by me. I will write often, and let you know everything. I know, as a rule, women have to do the waiting, and that to men it is harder to wait than to act. But have patience, preaches your very sincere friend,

ELINOR DREW,

CHAPTER XXIV.

A DOG IN THE MANGER.

"I HEAR he's head over heels in love with her, and that she doesn't mind, and that they're always together."

Colonel Crabtree was retailing his wife's budget of gossip to the doctor, as they sat smoking after mess on the raised daïs in the garden, one sultry night. A punkah swung over their heads as they lay extended, in white mess uniform, in huge armchairs, their feet on a level with their heads. Though it was dark, with a darkness that might be felt, the air was scorching. The crickets filled the night with their whirring, and the grinding of the thermantidote, pumping cool air into the mess, never ceased.

They imagined Miles Cranston, in a

chair not far off, fast asleep. But he had caught his wife's name, and what followed. It was enough. It fell upon him like a thunderbolt, driving the black buck and the pig out of his head.

That his peerless Hilda should thus be spoken of! More than that—that anyone should presume to love her! That she should be said not to mind!

When Colonel Crabtree was asked next morning at orderly-room for three days' leave to Simree for Colonel Cranston, he instantly grasped the situation, for he had learnt from his wife to take a keen interest in his neighbors' affairs.

"Certainly—certainly, my dear fellow. But take ten days, do. Three will be such a rush!"

But Cranston replied coldly that three would do, as he only wanted to run up and down again.

A day in the train with the glass at a hundred and anything; a burning night,

jolted along in a dāk-gharry; a hard canter up the hill, eleven miles, belaboring a hired pony, and Miles Cranston stood, quite unexpected, on the terrace of Fairview. The sound of a piano and voices singing drowned his approach. He stood nailed to the spot, looking through the pretty veranda, all hung with creepers and fern-baskets, into the open drawing-room window.

It *was* true, then. Hilda sat at the piano, playing, and a tall, good-looking young fellow leant against it, singing in a rich tenor voice, full of suppressed passion, these words, which filled the little room :

I think of all thou art to me,
I dream of what thou canst not be,
My life is cursed with thoughts of thee,
For ever and for ever.

My heart is full of grief and woe,
I see thy face where'er I go ;
I would to God it were not so !
For ever and for ever.

Perchance, if we had never met,
I had been spared this mad regret—
This endless striving to forget—
For ever and for ever.

Perchance, if thou wert far away,
Did I not see thee day by day,
I might again be blithe and gay
For ever and for ever.

Ah, no, I could not bear the pain
Of never seeing thee again !
I cling to thee with might and main
For ever and for ever.

Ah, leave me not ! I love but thee.
Blessing or curse, which e'er thou be ;
Oh, be as thou hast been to me
For ever and for ever.

As the song ended, Hilda raised her eyes, and the hidden watcher caught the glance she gave Alan. Never in her life had she looked at her husband like that, and he felt a stab of jealousy pierce him, and an irresistible inclination to throttle the other.

For an instant Alan returned Hilda's look with interest as her fingers idled

over the closing chords. Then he roused himself.

"I must go; I'm late already! And those fellows will be swearing! You are coming down to polo?" he added, taking up his hat.

"Yes, yes," she said; "but good-by for the present. I had no idea it was so late."

Adayre rushed out of the veranda without perceiving Miles. As he galloped off, the latter advanced to the window. Hilda was still idly playing the refrain of the song, her eyes fixed on vacancy with a far-away dreamy look, while her face wore a soft expression which absolutely transfigured it by giving a touch of life to its marble beauty.

Miles walked into the room. She turned with a cry and a look of blank astonishment. He sank into an easy-chair, and laid down his sun-hat.

"I hope I've not startled you," was his

greeting. "But I waited till that young gentleman had finished his song."

She rose with a scornful curl of her lips. That he should dare to play the eavesdropper on her.

"I hope you were edified. He has a nice voice, hasn't he?"

"Too powerful for this small room," rejoined Cranston. "Perhaps you'll be good enough to order me a whisky-peg, with a tub, and food to follow. I've had rather a quick journey."

"I beg your pardon ; how forgetful of me!" she replied, calling a servant. Then she lay back in a chair. "And now tell me to what I am indebted for this sudden visit? Are the pig and the buck extinct in the land, or is it too chilly for you down below?"

She spoke with icy sarcasm. It hurt her dignity to think he should have come up to thus spy upon her.

"No, indeed," he replied, draining a

fizzing glass. "My motives are entirely disinterested, and are connected with you and your friend who has just left."

"Alan Adayre is almost a connection of mine. I am sure you will like him. His mother was——"

"Never mind who his mother was. I doubt, all the same, if he would have cared to meet me just now," growled Miles, "though he seemed very much at home in my house. But, seriously," he continued, with his eyes fixed on the end of a long cigar he was lighting, "I am afraid I must ask you to request him to discontinue his visits."

Hilda started.

"The fact of the matter is, that your enemies up here (and you know you have a rare talent for making enemies) have been talking a great deal more about you and him than I care for. You see it has even filtered down to the regiment."

Hilda rose, and walked over to the window, where she stood erect and proud, her arms crossed behind her.

"Indeed, Miles, I am at a loss to understand you. It is positively insulting for you to attach any importance to the ill-natured gossip of scandal-mongering mischief-makers. You know what India is! More than that, I consider it degrading both to you and me and Mr. Adayre for you to come rushing up like this on the spur of the moment, on the strength of some tittle-tattle, to play the spy on *me*, your wife. If you don't trust me, you had better say so, and take me back with you."

Cranston puffed away in silence for a few minutes, and looked at her almost admiringly. She was certainly very handsome, now her anger was roused, and evidently he could rouse that if he was unable to excite any softer feeling, as that abominably good-looking young fellow

had done. He gave a little bitter chuckle at the idea.

"My dear Hilda, heroics are quite unnecessary. I *do* know India, and better than you do. I have no intention of inflicting the plains upon you just now. People would only talk the more. Therefore I shall feel obliged if, as my stay up here is limited to a few hours, you would favor me with writing a few lines to Mr.—Mr.—what's his name, and intimating that I don't want him to be seen in my house, or about with my wife, again. You are very good at letters, and you'll put it very nicely, I'm sure, without hurting his feelings, as I might do. You understand me, I'm sure."

A spasm of pain passed over Hilda's face, but she set her lips.

"I have so few friends, and he has been very kind to me. I'm very lonely up here. It will be hard to give him up."

"Doubtless!" rejoined her husband,

with a shrug. "I always notice that women like these piano-playing chaps. But I wish to remark," he continued, applying the thumb-screw of torture once more, "that there are ladies up here, whom you, forsooth, affect to despise, with their 'bow-wows' always hanging about after them, and their names in everyone's mouth. I presume you don't wish to qualify, in appearance at least, for the distinction they enjoy? You have an unusual share of pride and self-esteem, and I think you ought to be deuced obliged to me for giving up several days' sport in order to point out to you the danger you are running."

So saying he left the room and went to his tub.

Hilda sat a while, utterly crushed with the blow and her husband's biting words.

Had he been kind and gentle it would have been less hard to obey him. But he chose to pose in the light of a tyrant.

He asked her to give up this friendship, and offered her nothing in return. But then she was unaware that he had caught the glances she and Alan had exchanged, and was piqued and jealous at the secret bond of sympathy which united them.

Nevertheless, there was no struggle as she penned the letter. No shadow of a thought of disobeying her husband crossed her mind. Was he not her master, had he not a right to order?

But never before had her fetters so galled her; a strong feeling of indignation and resentment grew up within her and she almost felt she hated him. She stiffened herself into an icy scornful sternness.

They were both at thoroughly cross purposes. Each thoroughly misunderstood the other. Had she but unbent, begged his forgiveness, been sweet to him, the man, who was but human after all, and who never in his life had cared

for any other woman, would probably have melted, and been like wax in her hands.

By the time the colonel had tubbed and eaten his meal, it was time for him to think of starting off again. Of an iron constitution, heat and fatigue had no terrors for him. Besides, in the present unpleasant state of tension between them, he had no wish to prolong his visit to his wife.

As he came out of the dining room Hilda rose from her writing-table and held out the letter to him. A few bitter tears it had wrung from her had blotted it, and she had had to rewrite it.

Miles waved it aside, and lit another cigar.

"I don't want to see it, thanks. I've no doubt it's all right. I must be off now. Nothing more I can do for you? Nothing you want?"

Nothing she wanted? Her heart hun-

gered for sympathy, kindness, love ; and as she stood in the veranda, watching the colonel mount his pony, a wild longing for all of these surged in her heart under the stern set mask of her face.

He looked back at her at starting. All the rest of his life he never forgot the attitude of the tall graceful figure and the queenly head, standing framed in the creeper-covered archway.

Even then it was not too late. Had she made the slightest sign I think he would have come back to her ; but with a cold good-by, she passed into the house and was lost to his sight.

She sat down again at the piano ; it was always her friend, and had often been the confidant of her troubles. She folded her arms on the music-stand and buried her face a moment. Then suddenly she roused herself and began to sing and play with all the passion of her heartbroken soul. Miles, going down

the path under the terrace, caught the words :

I think of all thou art to me,
I dream of what thou canst not be ;
My life is cursed with thoughts of thee
For ever and for ever.

He put spurs to his pony and galloped
down the hill in a rage, at the imminent
risk of his neck.

CHAPTER XXV.

Far on the dim horizon, where the peaks
Of everlasting snow cut clear and cold
Against the sky, the spreading blaze of gold
Has slowly gathered. Now the red sun seeks
To raise his glowing disk above the rim
Of furthest mountains ; while, surrounding him,
The rainbow tints of sunrise chase away
The paling twilight of the dawning day.
Nearer the sleeping hilltops slowly take
Distincter form ; their rest shall not be broken
Until an awful voice shall bid them wake,
And the dread doom of this fair earth be spoken.
Yet, as on dead lips, when our troubles cease,
E'en so on them God's sunbeams pour the smile of peace.

THESE words, by a poetess who had lived and suffered in India like herself, came into Elinor Drew's mind one morning as they started at sunrise to march to a fresh camping-ground. Captain Drew wisely insisted on the tents being pitched before the heat of the day, and this necessitated an early start. But the air was still keen as they moved along the slowly wak-

ing valleys. The koel's bell-like note boomed from the dim underwood, and the little "karka" deer basked on the mountain side. In the van of the procession which dragged its weary length up and down the hill-paths came the baggage coolies, followed by the shivering, sulky servants. Reggie came next in his dandy, asleep in his ayah's arms; then Hetty on Mignonette; while Mrs. Drew brought up the rear in her dandy, with her husband striding by her side, laying in as large a stock of health as possible during his two months' leave.

A month of this nomad gipsying life, with so many hours of solitude with Nature, had given Hetty plenty of opportunity for thinking over many things which had never entered her little head during the whirl of her life at Simree. Both physically and mentally she was changed since that fatal night of the ball. An attack of fever had pulled her down,

and the suffering she had gone through in breaking off her engagement had told upon her spirits. There also she had experienced her first disillusionment. Too late for her peace of mind she had found out Jack Lacy's selfishness, and that he had only been amusing himself with her. The ideal hero she had pictured to herself showed up in his true colors. What had been such real earnest to her had been fun to him, and she awoke from her love-dream, saddened, disappointed, with her pride mortally wounded. If, in consequence, her character had deepened, some of her girlish buoyancy was lost for ever.

The sisters maintained a silence upon the unpleasant subject. The wound was too recent to bear touching; and as for Jim, Hetty felt unworthy even to speak his name.

On a lofty ridge, facing the snowy range, already veiling itself for the day in

its cloudy mantle, the breakfast table was spread under a shady ilex, and the meal was being cooked, as only a native can cook and serve three courses, on a stove of a few flat stones, and in some two or three saucepans fitting into each other.

The way then lay through an ilex forest, enlivened with flocks of green parroquets, scarlet rajah-birds, and a troop of huge gray "lungur" monkeys, which alarmed Reggie by throwing stones at them. Unseen torrents made music in hidden chasms, and presently they had a terribly hot stretch along a dry stony river-bed, where wild bowlders told ugly tales of the force of a 'few hours' rain, when the arid waste would be transformed into a raging, churning torrent.

The party encamped for that night on a grassy knoll studded with giant deodars, and sloping down to a little winding tarn. When they reached the spot, Hetty, tired with her ride, sat down to

rest against the horny trunk of a lofty pine. Closing her eyes, the sound of the wind moaning among the branches almost made her fancy herself at home once more on the seashore, but for the hammering of tent pegs, as the canvas encampment arose.

In the background Captain Drew was paying the coolies for their day's march. They sat in a semicircle round him, laughing and joking, for the hillmen are a more genial race than the effete dwellers in the plains. The men wore their hair long, and tied up in a tangled chignon. Their clothes were few and filthy. The women, who were quite equal to them as beasts of burden, were erect and strapping, in gay cotton petticoats tucked up about their knees, and their shawls arranged on their heads as a resting-place for the loads they bore. Their short jackets displayed a broad natural waistband, and all their worldly wealth jingled

on their necks and arms and anklets, in the shape of silver amulets and bangles.

In an incredibly short time the tents were pitched, with a trench round each in case of rain; the carpets spread, the portable furniture arranged, and the table laid for lunch. The water-carrier had filled his goatskin at the lake, and prepared the baths, and the cook was squatting, intent on culinary mysteries, in a hole in the ground. The liberated poultry-yard was scratching about, and the ponies were eating their midday meal in the shade, off their rugs.

Elinor came out of her tent with a budget of letters, brought out by a runner. Hetty expected none. Jim had made no sign since that fateful letter, and there had not been time for the parents at home to hear of the dreadful *dénouement* of her engagement.

Elinor sat down by her sister, and began to read her letters, when she was

called away by a violent altercation between Reggie and his ayah as to the necessity of his being tubbed.

Hetty, who had become strangely dreamy, glanced idly at the letters, and, seeing one in Mrs. Cranston's hand, took it up. As a rule, the latter's letters were meant equally for either sister. Whether such was the writer's intention in this case the reader shall judge :

DEAREST ELINOR :

In spite of an immense amount of amusements, which are being hurried on before the rains come, I have very little news to tell you, for you know I care for none of these things. I sang at the last 'Saturday Pop.,' and the audience were very kind. Mr. Adayre brought down the house with Tosti's 'Good-by!' You might have heard a pin drop, and he never sang better or with more feeling. I hear he is going away on a fishing expedition in the hills.

I see quite as much of Mrs. St. Clair as I care for ; for in spite of the Hindoostanee class Hetty spoke of, she is always wanting me to interpret between herself and her servants.

That odious Mrs. Chappell has reappeared. She has got quite as great a hold on Captain Lacy as

before her divorce. Yet what can he see in her? The vice and vulgarity stamped on her face are enough to disgust any right-minded man, and she is fast losing any looks she ever had. I hear Lady Jenkins is much annoyed with Captain Lacy about the affair, and won't receive her at Government House.

Here Hetty let the letter fall, horror-stricken. It was, of course, impossible that she should have remained any time at Simree without getting an inkling of the vice which abounded there. But, as a well-brought-up, pure-minded English girl, it had never till this moment come home to her in all its horrible deformity. Her idol was indeed shattered!

Directly her back was turned, it would appear that all the devotion Lacy had lavished on her was transferred to a notoriety like Mrs. Chappell, the heroine of a divorce case in which he had narrowly escaped playing a part. The voice which had been such music to her ears was now charming another; and, oh

shame! the lips which had kissed away her tears were in all probability——

Hetty started to her feet in a white heat of shame and indignation. As she did so, she noticed lying on the ground an unopened letter addressed to herself. But it was many minutes before curiosity got the better of pride, and she picked it up with loathing, as if it would sting her. Then she read :

HETTY :

You wouldn't see me before you left. You have never sent a line in answer to any of my notes. This is a worse quarrel than the one we had after Malta. But, to be sure, you have more to forgive. But I swear I couldn't help myself, you looked so lovely. But please forgive, and do not sulk any more with, your devoted but dejected

JACK.

“Read this!” cried Hetty, with flashing eyes and burning cheeks, as Elinor came up. “Oh, what does he take me for? Does he think I'll ever speak to him or see him again?”

And she tore the letter up into minute fragments, stamping them underfoot. Then she hid her face on her sister's shoulder.

“Oh, to think that for a man like *that* I should have given up——” and she burst into tears.

At sunset that evening the clouds banked up ominously in the east, and the wind howled fitfully among the pines. At night dark rain-clouds chased each other over the face of the moon. The artillery of heaven opened fire in prolonged volleys among the mountains. The rain came down in torrents, deluging the thirsty hills and scouring the gorges. At last the rains had broken.

Next day, in the lull after this preliminary canter, the little party made their way back into Simree as speedily as they could.

CHAPTER XXVI.

We kissed again with tears.

—*Tennyson.*

THE rains descended and the floods came. In England the haymaking was at its height, while the Himalayas were shrouded in autumnal gloom. Clouds like cotton-wool rolled stealthily up from the plains through the rift in the valley where the cascade was, and enveloped hill and lake in their moist embrace. The thunder would re-echo among the rocks, and wild winds, almost amounting to cyclones, whirled in a devil's dance up and down the gorges, and scourged the placid lake into a hissing sheet of foam. Then the rain poured down with great determination in steady sheets for twenty hours at a stretch, tearing up the roads and gorges.

Gayety collapsed, but died hard. Dining out became a nuisance, and a risk both to host and guest. The former was blissfully uncertain as to who would turn up; the latter had to brave the perils of insecure paths in murky darkness. Nevertheless, in the afternoon people turned up at the Assembly Rooms, swathed in mackintoshes and riding-aprons, or covered up in hooded dandies. The rains had much to answer for in the way of heavy whist and poker at the club. The natives went about protected only by a blanket over their heads, and drenched in their cotton garments. On the Mall there was a fine show of umbrellas, from Mrs. St. Clair's last new thing from Paris to the blue and red cotton one of the Bengalee "baboo," and the Robinson Crusoe style of thatched leaves affected by the hillmen.

Inside the draughty, ill-built bungalows the iron roofs leaked spasmodically, send-

ing insidious drops on the unwary sleeper's nose, if, indeed, sleep was possible, while the rain beat a devil's tattoo on the corrugated iron above. Boots and other leather things developed a coating of green mold; fungi flourished in neglected corners of the rooms, for the wood fires were powerless to cope with the damp. Scorpions domesticated themselves with ease; fish insects made onslaughts on pictures and paper; and the local chemist ran out of Keating's insect powder.

In the outside world the frogs and toads and ducks had a fine time. The former kept up a perpetual chorus of rejoicing round the lake. Leeches abounded in the grass, and inserted themselves in the unwary boot, or even into the noses of the dogs and horses, who had to be kept twenty-four hours without water before the intruder could be starved or, rather, thirsted out.

The parched mountains clothed themselves with vegetation. The trunks of the gnarled ilexes were draped with moss, with fringes of delicate ferns, and stood :

Bearded with moss and in garments green

Like the Druids of old,

With beards that rest on their bosom.

Rocks and boulders were carpeted with lycopodium and begonia, and in shady nooks flourished the shy maiden-hair.

But the climate was enervating, and Hetty's spirits drooped visibly. She shrank from going out, for fear of meeting Lacy and Mrs. Chappell, who were reported inseparable. Life seemed to her dull and gray, and the fresh English color faded from her cheeks. But in her lonely rides about the damp hillsides, she brooded much over Jim, and gradually mentioned him again in conversation with Hilda and Elinor, but always with a half-yearning, pathetic resignation, as of something heedlessly lost, or a sweet memory

that belonged to the closed chapter of the might-have-beens.

Elinor, in her loving solicitude, watched all these varying moods, and reported them faithfully to Jim, who waited below, sick at heart, grinding away in a fetid court-house like a Turkish bath, all his dreams and hopes so cruelly shattered.

But at last, one foggy afternoon, when you could not see across the lake, and, by reason of the deep veranda, the rooms were dim in Crag Cottage, a sound of sobbing reached Elinor from Hetty's room. Peeping cautiously in, she saw the golden head kneeling by her bed, crying over Jim's photograph and calling passionately on his name.

That very afternoon a telegram flew off to Bulamabad: "Come up as soon as you like."

"A word to the wise," said Elinor to Hilda, who was in the plot. "If that

doesn't bring him, he's not worth bringing!"

Hilda sighed. Life seemed just then to her a very hard, unsatisfactory puzzle for herself. But the advice she had given to Hetty, and which had contributed in a great measure to the latter's breaking with Jim, was turning out better than she had dared to hope. The false love had been unmasked, and Hetty and Jim, both tried as by fire, were coming out in their true colors. So Hilda rejoiced exceedingly, with a joy in which there was no bitterness, over the happy conclusion which was looming in the distance.

Two days after the telegram went off, Jim Sherringham, bemackintoshed and belhelmeted, wet and weary with his rapid journey, stood, as Miles Cranston had stood, upon the terrace of a hill bungalow. And what was to be his reception?

A golden-haired little figure he so well remembered stood, bareheaded, watching

the ghost of a sunset trying to light up with a few touches of color the heavy raincloud overhanging the opposite mountain.

He flung himself off his pony and stood, with outstretched arms, hesitating to advance, and a yearning cry of "Hetty!" made her turn round with a start.

She made as if she would have fled from him into the house. But, with a sudden impulse, she came toward him hanging her head like a penitent child.

"Jim! can you ever forgive me?"

For all answer he caught her in his arms, while a parting effort of the sinking sun flooded the valley with gold.

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN DEATH THEY WERE NOT DIVIDED.

FOR the next three days it never stopped raining, though I doubt if Hetty and Jim, in their newly-found happiness, cared very much if it was wet or fine.

The fourth morning the rain was slackening as Alan Adayre rode into Simree on his way back to the plains at the conclusion of his fishing expedition. He had felt, on receiving Hilda's letter, prompted by her husband, that there was nothing for it but to take himself out of the way, and he had been spending a lonely dismal time in the various dāk-bungalows or rest-houses, dotted at intervals along the chief hill-paths, and to which custom condemns for their honey-

moon Anglo-Indian brides and their grooms.

Adayre had hardly begun his breakfast at the club before there was a great commotion. Excited servants rushed in with the alarming news that part of the hill behind the Empress Hotel had slipped, and had buried some outhouses and some natives.

Adayre and some other men immediately set out for the scene of the catastrophe, where they found a fatigue party of soldiers from the dépôt, with their officers, and many volunteers, digging to rescue the victims, while the inmates of the hotel were hurriedly preparing for flight.

For some quarter of an hour Adayre loitered on the spot, till suddenly his ear caught a scrap of a conversation between two of the local engineers which roused him with a start.

"I quite agree with you," said one,

"None of the houses straight above here are safe. The heavy rains have undermined the hill."

"Some more may come down at any moment," remarked the other.

Alan looked up horror stricken. Hilda's house, Fairview, stood right in the middle of the shaly hillside which was doomed.

There was no time to be lost. Adayre flung himself on his pony and, telling the groom to follow him to Fairview, galloped off.

None of the bystanders actually saw him go.

Alan dashed up the hillside, urging the gray mare with might and main, a deadly fear at his heart. The husband's anger, her own command to him never to come again, were alike forgotten in the fearful peril that threatened her. That he was putting himself into the same peril never once crossed his mind.

The zigzags were long and steep, the

gray mare was tired with her march that morning. Never had she, the heroine of so many polo-fights, been thus driven and spurred.

How changed all seemed since he had last mounted the hill on his way to Fairview, full of enthusiasm and love, toiling upward as to the shrine of some deity! As the rainstorms had cut and marred the path, so had misery seared his heart!

But the gray mare, with heaving, dripping flanks, could do no more, and Adayre jumped off her, and left her loose, not far from Hilda's gate. He rushed across the terrace, and entering the drawing-room unannounced, found Hilda with some servants, hastily packing a few treasures.

She turned and looked at him, and uttered an involuntary cry of "Alan" in which joy predominated over surprise. Then she added reproachfully.

"Why have you come here?"

For answer there came a sudden shock

as of an earthquake, which made the house tremble, followed by a reeling and a grinding as the floor gave way under their very feet.

Alan seized Hilda to drag her out into the terrace. As he did so, there was a crashing and falling of timbers about their ears : the house was breaking up.

She looked round, and clung to him with a cry of terror.

“Alan ! what is it ?”

“It is death !” he answered, pressing his cold lips on hers.

No human eye saw what happened next. A great cloud of dust rose up to heaven and mercifully hid the scene.

When it cleared away the horror-stricken spectators on the other side of the valley saw that a huge slice of the mountain had slipped, carrying with it trees and houses, overwhelming at one fell swoop and with lightning speed the hotel, the temple by the shore, the Euro-

pean shop, and the Assembly Rooms. Chaotic masses of *débris* filled the bottom of the valley, beneath which lay buried alike lovers, soldiers, priests, and shop-keepers, even the amateur actors rehearsing at the Rooms. To add to the horror of the scene, a great wave surged down the startled lake and flooded the lower bazaar.

Never, surely, since the days of Pompeii had such sudden destruction overtaken a place almost equally fair and frivolous !

A panic seized the terror-stricken inhabitants. The whole basin might be doomed ; no hillside seemed safe. There was a scramble for *dák-gharrys* at the foot of the hill, as many fled thankfully into the fierce heat of the plains.

In the midst of all this devastation the rains which had worked all this woe ceased for a few days, and the sun shone out brightly over the ruined valley.

And Hilda ?

Alas ! In the sad hearts of those who loved her there was but little doubt as to her fate. Many were the futile excavations made, but of her, her home, as of so many others, no trace was ever found.

But Adayre's fate was involved in some mystery. He was known to have returned to Simree, and had last been seen at the doomed hotel. At length his native groom came forward and tremblingly explained how his master had ridden off up the fatal hill, and had ordered him to follow him to Cranston sahib's bungalow. But he was tired, and had lagged behind. The landslip had followed, and he knew nothing more, except that in the evening he had found the gray mare quietly gazing on the hillside near where the house had stood.

Colonel Cranston came up next day, a miserable man, stricken with lifelong remorse. His beautiful wife was lost to him, and how had they last parted !

The wretched man wandered about the ruins and the *débris* dazed, seeking some sign of her, the only woman he had ever loved. But he found none; she had utterly vanished. His mute despair, for he would hardly speak to anyone, was terrible to witness.

A few days later he happened to get hold of Adayre's groom, and heard his story. Its effect upon him was terrible, and his last state was worse than his first. He left the place immediately, madly jealous even of the dead. Shortly afterward his papers were sent in, and now and then the sportsman, wandering in some of the remotest shooting-grounds of Cashmere and Ladak, comes upon traces of a mysterious Englishman, whom the natives call mad, forever toiling after, and bringing down, marvelous specimens of ibex and other large and difficult game.

To Hilda's friends, however, there

came, with time, a mournful satisfaction in the thought that those two, so lovely and pleasant in their lives, in death, at least, were not divided.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AFTER.

Two years later Jim and Hetty found themselves once more in Simree. Green was the great scar that seared the mountain-side, and green also the graves of the victims who had been recovered and buried in the cemetery. Simree was herself again, as frivolous as ever.

A gaudy Hindoo temple had arisen on the opposite shore of the lake ; a new boathouse and new boats from England replaced those mementoes of Hetty's victory which had been shattered. The polo-ground was higher, of course, than before, but had been releveled. Another Assembly Rooms had been reared almost

on the exact site of the former building, and the Simree world danced and acted and flirted over the unknown graves of their countrymen and countrywomen, as if no catastrophe had ever overwhelmed the beautiful valley.

But Hetty was altered. Two hot seasons at Bulamabad would, to any other eyes but those of Jim, have left their traces on her beauty. She was a soberer, staidier Hetty, too, with her character deepened by the varied ups and downs of life; and a matronly Hetty, burdened with the absorbing responsibility of a little Hilda of her own, a baby the like of which, in its parents' eyes, had never been seen in the universe.

The two stood together in the new memorial chancel of St. John's in the Wilderness, and looked, as Hetty leaned on her husband's arm, at a small tablet, erected by herself and Elinor. But Cap-

tain Drew had come into money, his soldiering days were over, and Elinor was never likely to set eyes upon it :

To the beloved memory of Hilda, wife of Lieutenant-Colonel Miles Cranston, B. S. C., who perished in the great landslip of 1880, aged twenty-three years. This tablet is erected by her friends, H. S. and E. D.

By some strange accident, among the many memorial brasses on the wall, they found the following almost side by side with the above :

In memory of Alan Adayre, Lieutenant, Royal Horse Artillery, who was killed in the landslip of 1880. This memorial is erected by his brother officers of X Battery, Z Brigade, R. H. A.

"O Jim!" said Hetty softly, as her eyes filled, "we owe her so much. But for her I should never have given you up only to have the happiness of gaining you back again. Poor Hilda!" she added; "I understand now what she

missed! It is well for her she is at rest."

She has drunk of the Lethe at length; she has eaten the lotus.

What matters it now for her that sorrows are born and die?

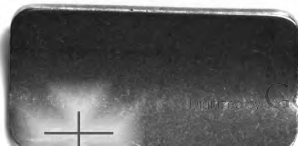
She has said to the dream that caressed, to the sorrow that smote us,
Good-night and good-by!

THE END.

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